Pursuing a Unifying Message

Elevating Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Research as a National Priority

A Food, Nutrition and Health Research Perspective

Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation

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Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation
Iowa State University
Institute of Food Technologists

and

American Society for Nutrition

in a partnership with

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The Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation is committed to promoting a broader and more complete understanding of agriculture and to building upon Charles Valentine Riley’s legacy as a “whole picture” person with a vision for enhancing agriculture through scientific knowledge.

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Farida Mohamedshah, Institute of Food Technologists
Sarah Ohlhorst, American Society for Nutrition
Brian Meyer, Iowa State University
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The Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF) thanks the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) for hosting the food, nutrition and health roundtable on May 3, 2016. Special thanks to Dr. Rush Holt, CEO of AAAS, who opened the roundtable with insightful remarks and engaged with participants during the day’s program. We are grateful for the support of the AAAS staff, particularly Bethany Spencer, Nicolle Rutledge and Matt Hourihan, who not only helped to ensure the event proceeded smoothly but also contributed to the day’s discussions and content. In 2015, AAAS hosted similar RMF roundtables of university leaders and scientific societies. We value our relationship with AAAS in hosting the unifying message events, and for our continuing partnership in presenting the annual AAAS Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Lecture and the AAAS Riley Lecture Leadership Breakfast.

We thank each of the 22 representatives who participated in the roundtable. We appreciated their time, efforts and valuable contributions on this important topic of food, nutrition and health research as part of building a unifying message to make increased funding for food, agriculture and natural resources a higher national priority.

Special thanks to the speakers who shared thoughtful presentations that significantly added to the day’s program: Robert Burns, Vice President, Health and Nutrition Policy, Grocery Manufacturers Association; John Coupland, Professor of Food Science, Penn State University, and President-Elect, Institute of Food Technologists; Eric Hentges, Executive Director, International Life Sciences Institute, North America; Marianne Smith Edge, Senior Advisor, Science and Consumer Insights, International Food Information Council and Foundation; Patrick Stover, Professor and Director, Division of Nutrition Sciences, Cornell University, and President, American Society for Nutrition; and Catherine Woteki, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics and Chief Scientist.

Twenty-one people attended the roundtable as observers, representing government agencies and diverse organizations and stakeholders. We appreciated them spending the day with us and expressing continued interest in learning more about the unifying message process and following the evolution of the discussions.

Thank you to the co-chairs of the roundtable, Farida Mohamedshah and Sarah Ohlhorst, for their leadership and commitment to making this meeting a reality. We also thank Megan Messina, Jennie Stitzinger and Kevin Mathieu for their tremendous assistance in bringing this roundtable to fruition. The members of the roundtable steering committee are listed below; we thank them for their service and commitment. We also thank Maya Breitburg-Smith and Meg Perry of RESOLVE for facilitating the roundtable and developing this report. Our appreciation also goes to Brian Meyer, Iowa State University, for his efforts in planning and preparations as well as serving as a speaker.
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Alison Steiber, Chief Science Officer, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
On May 3, 2016, a group representing more than 20 food, nutrition, health and research-focused organizations gathered to discuss the idea of pursuing a unifying message to elevate food, agricultural and natural resources research as a national priority. Highlights from the roundtable discussion are listed below.

• **Win-win for diverse stakeholders.** Participants generally supported the effort to develop a unifying message of elevating food and nutrition research, important components of the food, agricultural and natural resources research portfolios, as a national priority. The diversity of groups and stakeholders involved in a unifying message effort is both a strength and a challenge. The message can be stronger and more effective with the support of a broad base of stakeholders. But organizers should be cautious of diluting the message by attempting to represent the interests of everyone. Synergies among diverse groups should be explored to identify win-win situations in which each stakeholder feels they are benefiting overall by committing to a unified message.

• **Public good focus.** A unifying message should focus on the public good that results from public investment in research, and also acknowledge the key role the private sector plays, both through its own research and in partnership with the public sector.

• **Benefits for health care system.** Nutrition and the food system are critical to public health. Reducing health care costs and increasing productivity are potential economic arguments for increased investment in food, nutrition and public health research. Federally funded research should not be viewed as something that costs the government, but an investment toward reducing strain on the health care system.

• **Filling data gaps.** Important data gaps related to food, nutrition and public health exist, as highlighted in several of the speakers’ presentations. A unifying message could highlight these data gaps as positive opportunities to gain knowledge.

• **Flexible funding framework.** A unifying message should consider a funding framework that allows for flexibility so research can adapt to emerging or evolving needs of food, nutrition and health, and new federal funding mechanisms for research that more closely align with the structure and needs of current research.

• **Critical communications.** Communications should play a prominent role in this effort in targeting the message to policymakers. Communication to policymakers should be focused, consistent, positive and concise. Also, increasingly effective communication around these topics is needed in building public trust in scientific information. Compelling narratives are a valuable tool to reach advocacy audiences.
The Food, Nutrition and Health Roundtable organized by the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF) and its partners is part of a larger effort to pursue a unifying message to elevate funding for research for food, agriculture and natural resources as a national priority. The first event, held at the National Press Club in December 2014, provided the foundation for subsequent stakeholder roundtable discussions on the value, opportunities and challenges of a unifying message. In the discussions, agriculture is broadly defined to include food, fiber, nutrition, energy, natural resources, environmental quality and more. Roundtables, organized by RMF and hosted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), were held in April and December of 2015 and focused on university and scientific society perspectives, respectively. The Food, Nutrition and Health Roundtable, held on May 3, 2016, at AAAS, brought together stakeholders with interests in food, nutrition and health research to better understand their priorities and their thoughts on possible elements of a unifying message.

Research continues to illuminate the integral role nutrition plays role in human growth and development throughout the life cycle, in maintaining good health and functionality, in addressing genetic disorders and in the prevention and treatment of diseases. There is a great need to further enhance our understanding of the relationship between food, nutrition and health and to advance the role of nutrition in improving and sustaining health, reducing health care costs and increasing economic productivity.

The National Nutrition Research Roadmap 2016-2021, released on March 4, 2016, by the Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition, identified critical research gaps and opportunities to accelerate advances in nutrition research. Increased public funding is needed to maintain and accelerate progress in improving and sustaining health, and to reduce the morbidity, mortality and health care costs linked to food and nutrition-related chronic diseases across all age groups and demographics. Many professional societies advocate for increases in public funding for food and nutrition research to improve public health. However, their efforts are primarily focused in their respective areas of interest. In light of declining funding and the important role of food and nutrition in public health, it is important that all interested stakeholders come together to help build a unifying message that includes support for increasing public funding for food and nutrition research.

Scope and purpose. This report summarizes the key themes discussed and input received during the roundtable held on May 3, 2016, hosted by AAAS. RMF and its partners organized the roundtable to provide an opportunity for a diverse set of food, nutrition and health organizations and stakeholders to come together to discuss elements of the unifying message related to food, nutrition and health research that ultimately advances public health. The roundtable brought together representatives from universities, industry, government, scientific societies and diverse food, nutrition and health organizations, as well as other stakeholders. Representatives of professional scientific societies in food, nutrition and health have especially been leaders in defining best practices in the scientific endeavor, helping prioritize the nation’s research agenda and helping to determine funding priorities within public agencies and private philanthropies. Leaders of these societies frequently are called upon to provide scientific expertise and input as Congress determines priorities for federal research spending. Given their central role as representatives of scientific disciplines, the societies help define both visionary and narrow priorities for research. Because of the broad reach of their memberships and their presence in and around Washington, D.C., these organizations are essential players in helping to develop a unifying message that includes food, nutrition and health research priorities.

The main purpose of the roundtable was to better understand the priorities of food, nutrition and health stakeholders and to ask participants to identify elements of a unifying message that would be important for delivering
to members of Congress and other influential leaders in rallying support for increased federal research funding. Objectives of the roundtable included:

- Ensuring broad awareness among food, nutrition and health roundtable participants of RMF’s efforts to craft a unifying message and garner support.
- Discussing the process involved in developing and sustaining a unifying message.
- Identifying components that participants would want included in a unifying message related to food, nutrition and health.

**Budget trends and considerations.** Given the broad scope of food, health and nutrition research, recognition of the involvement of multiple federal funding agencies is important. Research and development funding for food and nutrition research primarily resides within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), specifically within the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Other federal agencies contribute to nutrition research, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Department of Defense (DOD); the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; the Veterans Administration; the National Science Foundation; and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Matthew Hourihan, director of research and development budget and policy program for AAAS, summarized key trends in federal funding for agricultural research. He outlined that spending across all federal science agencies has been reduced since 2010, with USDA research and development funding reduced by more than 20 percent from 2010 levels as of 2013 (Figure 1). He noted that a slight recovery in recent years has largely been the result of short-term appropriations for construction.

Looking to the future, Hourihan noted that low discretionary spending is expected to continue through at least 2018. He also highlighted anticipated long-term increases in mandatory federal spending, with entitlement payments to individuals expected to compose 70 percent of the federal budget in 2016, having risen from less than 30 percent in the 1960s (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 1. Percent Change in Federal Science Agency Spending, FY 2010–2016**

![Graph showing percent change in federal science agency spending, FY 2010–2016.](image-url)
Food, nutrition and health research needs. Important data gaps and research needs related to food, nutrition and public health were highlighted in several presentations. Roundtable participants affirmed that a unifying message could highlight these data gaps as positive opportunities to gain knowledge.

In her opening remarks, USDA Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics Catherine Woteki highlighted the importance of agricultural activity to the United States, with 10 percent of American jobs tied to food and agriculture and agricultural products making up 6 to 10 percent of annual U.S. export value. In addition to being a crucial component of the economy, Woteki noted the critical role of the food system in maintaining public health and national security. She identified the following food and nutrition strategies as central to strengthening the nation’s food and agricultural system:

- Linking food systems to health outcomes
- Implementing and improving nutrition monitoring
- Building the scientific basis for dietary guidance
- Identifying and implementing approaches to prevent obesity and related diseases

Woteki identified several promising approaches to leveraging research funding, which included:

- Research partnerships between federal agencies via interagency agreements (e.g., USDA-DOD food safety partnership)
- Crosscutting initiatives involving many government agencies focused on a specific problem (e.g., Feed the Future initiative, pollinator health, combating antibiotic resistant bacteria)
- Research grant programs jointly sponsored by several agencies and informed by needs arising in the scientific community (e.g., USDA-Department of Education grants for biomass development to supply biofuels)
- Public-private partnerships (e.g., Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, the 2014 Farm Bill-established program that matches federal funds with nonfederal sources; and technology transfer from USDA Agricultural Research Service to private-sector partners).

Woteki emphasized the impending changes in Administration and Congress after the 2016 elections were an opportunity to put forward arguments on the critical need to invest more in food, nutrition and health research, with fresh messaging and a coordinated approach.
Patrick Stover of Cornell University, the president of the American Society for Nutrition, spoke on the importance of enhancing the understanding of the role of food and nutrition in health promotion and disease prevention. He identified the need to understand relationships between food, nutrition and health to prevent and treat diet-related diseases and improve health outcomes, especially for older adults and children ages birth to 24 months. Stover highlighted research priorities identified by the American Society for Nutrition, including:

- Achieving personalized nutrition with dietary recommendations tailored to each person’s needs, particularly recognizing the different nutritional needs of healthy and clinical populations
- Understanding how nutrition during critical early periods of development, including pregnancy, impacts future health
- Improving health with noncommunicable disease prevention and weight maintenance, especially for older adults
- Slowing disease progression through nutrition with improved responses to therapy and survival rates, especially for older adults
- Realizing the potential of the food environment to improve diet

John Coupland of Penn State University, the president-elect of the Institute of Food Technologists, emphasized the need to increase access to safe, affordable and sustainably produced nutritious foods to meet population demands. He spoke to the needs and opportunities in advancing food and agricultural research, including:

- Addressing competing priorities and disagreements within the industry around the best ways to process food
- Developing effective public-private partnerships where goals of the food industry and those of public health overlap
- Building on recent advances in food and nutrition science and technology, including new techniques and information related to the human microbiome and food pathogen genetics
- Ensuring that decision-makers recognize the importance of food affordability and understand the full range of wealth involved in making food decisions — that what is affordable to one is not to another
- Identifying ways to systematically reduce food waste
- Advancing the ecological and economic sustainability of food systems
- Looking for areas of mutual gain where food science and technology can benefit agricultural systems, the environment and public health
- Capitalizing on recent renewed interest among the public in food and food production systems

Eric Hentges of International Life Sciences Institute said critical research was needed to support and encourage dietary recommendations for healthy eating. Research priorities related to dietary guidelines included:

- Creating dietary guidelines around dietary patterns
- Using a systems approach that considers economics, culture, region, culinary practices and sustainability as part of the landscape of nutrition
- Advancing personalized nutrition and nutrigenomics, including the need for new ways of collecting, managing and analyzing large quantities of health and nutrition data
- Integrating innovations and emerging issues (e.g., CRISPR genome editing, the human microbiome) with existing knowledge and guidelines

Marianne Smith Edge of the International Food Information Council highlighted the need for trustworthy food and nutrition messaging. She emphasized the importance of communication in influencing the attitudes and beliefs that shape health-related behavior. She reviewed results of recent IFIC Food & Health surveys, which indicate low consumer trust in nutritional information. The surveys also reveal the perceptions of what constitutes a trustworthy source of nutritional information, which can be linked to demographic parameters such as age and educational attainment. Research on consumer perceptions and effective communication strategies is needed to help motivate consumers to adopt healthful lifelong behavior changes.
Discussion

During the roundtable discussion, participants reflected on the presentations and provided input on elements of a unifying message in support of food, nutrition and health research, and challenges and opportunities associated with pursuing a unifying message. Feedback from participants is summarized below.

Components of a Unifying Message

**Emphasis on the public good.** The grand challenges for food and agriculture for the future are not only business or academic challenges, but challenges for the provisioning and health of society and humanity as a whole. As such, the unifying message should emphasize the essential role of food, nutrition and health research to complement traditional agricultural and medical research in supporting and protecting the public good. A unifying message should clearly state the benefits of research in improving the health of Americans and point out the risks to public good associated with underfunding research. In addition to highlighting the importance of robust public funding for research, the unifying message should acknowledge the key role the private sector plays, both through its own research and in partnership with the public sector.

**Economic outcomes.** Economic arguments that underlie increased investments in food, nutrition and health research can strengthen the unifying message. It will be important to emphasize long-term payoffs of research in specific economic terms such as increased lifespan, increased productivity and reduction in expenditures such as health care.

**Linkage to broad priorities.** A unifying message should clearly articulate the ways that food and nutrition link to broader public health, national security, environmental and economic priorities. Examples of these linkages include the implications of climate change and ecosystem health on human health and agricultural productivity, the relationship between food production and handling practices and its nutritional content and the influence of diet on other health indicators.

Challenges and Opportunities

**Diversity of stakeholders.** The stakeholders in food, nutrition and health and agricultural research sometimes see themselves as competing, and can have widely varied and occasionally conflicting interests. This diversity of viewpoints may pose a challenge to agreement on a unifying message. However, if such a diverse group could come together with a common cause, the range of interests represented would give the message even more weight. Synergies among diverse groups should be explored to identify win-win situations in which each stakeholder feels they are benefiting overall. One potential model to explore is the “One Health” initiative that seeks to bring together diverse partners working in human, animal and environmental health.

**Building trust.** To counter a growing public mistrust of scientific information related to food, nutrition, and health, stakeholders should take advantage of opportunities that arise with new research findings to more effectively communicate food and nutrition information in ways that build the understanding and trust necessary to effect positive changes in health outcomes, behavior and other indicators of success.

**Targeted messaging and priorities.** Communication efforts targeting policymakers should be focused, consistent, positive and concise. Compelling narratives are a valuable tool to reach advocacy audiences. For issues
facing significant information gaps, the illumination of tradeoffs for policymakers, rather than identifying a single solution, was proposed as a framework for communicating research priorities.

**Improved funding mechanisms.** There was significant interest in more flexible and collaborative funding mechanisms designed to help coordinated research efforts succeed and ensure the effective implementation of findings in support of the public good. Public-private partnerships, matching funds, interagency initiatives and grant-making, and the scaling up of local research efforts were all cited as promising models.

**Conclusion**

**Value to participants.** Participants found the roundtable informative and expressed an interest in staying involved. Following the meeting, a short survey was sent to participants to gauge the value of the discussion and to offer to keep them informed on future unifying message developments. Many respondents reaffirmed the value of increased collaboration and the great potential benefit of increased funding for priority research to address society’s most pressing food, nutrition and health needs.

**RMF plans for 2016 and beyond.** RMF plans to organize additional stakeholder events in 2016 and secure additional endorsements from key leaders and stakeholder organizations over the course of the year. RMF plans to generate an integrated status report on the unifying message, tentatively scheduled for early 2017.
Participants

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