AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE

Intended Testimony of Betsy Booren, Ph.D., Director, Scientific Affairs
To the
Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services in Response
To the
Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Technical Report

July 8, 2010

Affiliation: American Meat Institute
Sources of Funding: No conflict

I am Dr. Betsy Booren, the Director of Scientific Affairs for the American Meat Institute Foundation. AMI appreciates the effort of the Committee and is pleased that the technical report accurately characterized meat and poultry as containing "high quality protein."

Unfortunately, while the report affirms meat's nutritional value, it simultaneously advises consumers to moderate their consumption of meat.

Meat and poultry is allocated a relatively small part of the pyramid, yet the benefits from its share of the pyramid are significant. Consuming meat provides Americans a simple, direct, and balanced dietary source of all essential amino acids. Depending only upon plant proteins requires, as the Committee acknowledged, "thorough planning." The careful balancing of plant proteins requires advance planning that is not consistent with the lifestyle of Americans. They look for simplicity and convenience - not complexity in making dietary choices – a critical point that the Committee discussed during its deliberations.

In addition to protein, meat and poultry also are important and rich sources of micronutrients such as iron, selenium, Vitamins A, B12, and folic acid. These nutrients are not present in plant foods or, if they are, they have low bioavailibity. Supplementation, while useful, does not completely address issues of bioavailability.

Also significant was the discussion during the May 2010 meeting of Committee that the meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts food group is currently consumed at or less than the current recommended amount. This conclusion likely is a surprise to many who are under the mistaken impression that Americans over-eat meat and poultry products.

As you develop the *Dietary Guidelines,* we urge you to word the recommendation in such a way that does not lead consumers to reduce their meat, poultry, and beans consumption. Language in the technical report recommending that consumers "moderate" their meat and poultry consumption may be perceived as advice to "reduce" their consumption, which could have unintended consequences by creating nutritional deficiencies.

Concerns about unintended consequences are not a new concept to the Committee. At the April 2010 meeting, Committee member Dr. Eric Rimm discussed his concern that a recommendation

to eat a low fat diet in the 1970s led in part to over-consumption of simple carbohydrates and this change in diet contributed to Americans' current obesity epidemic. AMI encourages the agencies to consider this with respect to meat and poultry guidelines and not create a similar mistake.

Unfortunately, some sections of the report reveal a strong bias against processed meats. We realize that this is largely due to concerns about sodium levels in some products.

Although sodium certainly offers flavor, in meat and poultry it also affects the texture and sensory attributes of the product and has a tremendous food safety benefit because it prevents spoilage and reduces risks from pathogens. Reducing sodium is not as simple as adding less and sending the product to market. We must ensure that there are no unintended food safety consequences to product reformulation.

Still, in response to public health concerns the industry is actively involved in efforts to reduce sodium in our products with over 50% of the processed meat and poultry market undergoing recent sodium reduction reformulation. Some companies are promoting their efforts through labeling "reduced sodium." Others are handling it more quietly, fearing that such labeling is the adverse marketing equivalent of a "Mr. Yuck" sticker on a package.

I thank you for your time and consideration. AMI looks forward to providing a more detailed response to the Report in our written comments.