

Setting the Record Straight: Nutrition and Health Professionals Define Healthful Food

We, the undersigned health and nutrition professionals, know that healthful food is essential to healthy lives and to a healthy society, environment, and economy. At a time when people are experiencing unnecessary death and chronic disease, where food plays a significant role, we are compelled—personally and professionally—to promote the public’s health and to advocate for access to healthful food for all. Yet the foods that reach our plates are often unhealthful, resulting from an industrial food system which produces a preponderance of highly processed, high-calorie, low-nutrient foods that are more available, affordable, and aggressively marketed than healthful foods. We are committed to changing those circumstances so that everyone can eat healthful food.

Our definition of healthful food is not limited to the nutrients that a food contains. Our definition recognizes that healthful food comes from a food system where food is produced, processed, transported, and marketed in ways that are environmentally sound, sustainable and just. The current industrial food system, with its heavy reliance on fossil fuels, pesticides and fertilizers, antibiotics, and intensive farming practices fails to meet this standard. It pollutes the air, water, and soil, harms farm animals, and endangers the health of those who work to feed us.

While the destructive food system impacts everyone, some feel its ill effects more than others. Small- and mid-size farmers are struggling to survive in the face of large-scale industrial agriculture—farming families are more likely to live in poverty compared to the general U.S. population. In cruel irony, many farm workers do not earn enough wages to put healthful food on their own families’ tables. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are hit hard too; in these communities unhealthful, highly processed foods are heavily promoted, ubiquitous, and cheap, while healthful, wholesome food is often inaccessible.

Many large food and beverage manufacturers distract the public from the dangers of the food system by deceptively marketing products as “green” or “natural” and by using misleading health claims that allow highly processed foods to masquerade as healthful. In reality, the health-giving properties of food come from whole and minimally processed foods—mostly from plants—that contain a wide variety of naturally occurring nutrients.

As health and nutrition professionals, we stand for a food system in which wholesome food is the norm. We support the following principles, which provide a definition of healthful food and a framework for developing programs, shaping community food systems, and advocating for food, nutrition, and agriculture policies that truly promote health. We also challenge food and beverage companies to produce food that reflects these principles and to stop using deceptive health claims and green marketing to blur the lines between wholesome food and highly processed food products.

HEALTHFUL FOOD PRINCIPLES

Healthful Food is wholesome.

- ❖ It includes whole and minimally processed fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, eggs, dairy, meats, fish, and poultry.
- ❖ It contains naturally occurring nutrients (e.g., vitamins, minerals, phyto-nutrients).
- ❖ It is produced without added hormones or antibiotics.
- ❖ It is processed without artificial colors or flavors or unnecessary preservatives.

Healthful Food is produced, processed, and transported in a way that prevents the exploitation of farmers, workers, and natural resources, and the cruel treatment of animals. The process of healthful food production:

- ❖ Upholds the safety and quality of life of all who work to feed us.
- ❖ Treats all animals humanely.
- ❖ Protects the finite resources of soil, water, air, and biological diversity.
- ❖ Supports local and regional farm and food economies.
- ❖ Replaces fossil fuels with renewable energy sources.

Healthful Food should be available, accessible, and affordable to everyone.

- ❖ Distributed equitably among all communities.
- ❖ Available and emphasized in children's environments such as childcare, school, and after-school settings.
- ❖ Promoted within institutions and workplaces, in cafeterias, vending machines, and at meetings and events.
- ❖ Reflective of the natural diversity found in traditions and cultures.

The stage is set for health and nutrition professionals to ally with other groups advocating for healthful and sustainable food in calling for government and industry policies that reshape our food system into one that supplies us with healthful food. Please join us in supporting this vision.

**Endorse *Setting the Record Straight* at
www.preventioninstitute.org/sa/settingtherecordstraight.html**

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