

Data from the Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals for Policy Decisions

The U.S. Department of Agriculture conducts nationwide food surveys that provide a rich source of detailed information to the public and private sectors. This paper describes the most recent survey, the 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), and uses of CSFII data for policy decisions.

Lori G. Borrud, U.S. Department of Agriculture¹
Mary Y. Hama, U.S. Department of Agriculture²
Alanna J. Moshfegh, U.S. Department of Agriculture³
Joseph D. Goldman, U.S. Department of Agriculture⁴

To ensure the health and well-being of Americans through improved nutrition and food choices, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has conducted nationwide food surveys since the 1930's. These surveys provide a rich source of detailed information to public and private sectors--including the Congress; USDA and other Federal agencies; state and local agencies; diverse members of the food industry; and research and educational institutions.

The 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), commonly called the *What We Eat in America* survey, is the most recent USDA food survey. The CSFII is the only nationwide survey that measures the kinds and amounts of food eaten by Americans and links attitudes and knowledge about diet and health knowledge with food and nutrient intakes through the Diet and Health Knowledge Survey (DHKS). The target population for the 1994-96 CSFII is individuals of all ages in the United States. Food intake data are collected on two nonconsecutive days, with both days of intake collected by the 24-hour dietary recall method. The survey provides data to meet precision requirements for 20 sex-age domains for the general population and 20 low-income domains. The DHKS sample consists of adults 20 years of age and over from the CSFII who provided at least one day of dietary intake data. Over the three years, dietary intakes were collected for more than 16,000 individuals. About 6,000 adults participated in the DHKS. The newly-developed CSFII Pyramid Servings Data Base provides CSFII food intake in Pyramid servings per person per day.

The USDA food surveys are used for a number of public policy applications as well as addressing a variety of research topics. Applications include monitoring the nutritional adequacy of American diets, measuring the nutritional impact of food fortification, developing dietary guidance and related programs, estimating exposure of population groups to food contaminants, evaluating the nutritional impact of food assistance programs, evaluating the nutritional impact of food labeling, and assessing the demand for agricultural projects.

Adequacy of diet is an important measure of well-being. In the 1998 Economic Report of the President to Congress, CSFII data were used to measure the adequacy and sufficiency of children's food intake. The percentage of children under age 18 in low-income households reporting that there is sometimes or often "not enough to eat" declined from 13.5 percent in 1989-91 to 9.4 percent in 1994-96. Other CSFII results show that the percentage of individuals consuming at least the recommended number of Pyramid servings increases with higher income levels. In addition, the percentage of calories from fat is lower for those with higher income levels. To determine appropriate levels of folate fortification, the Food and Drug Administration used CSFII 1989-91 data that estimated the effect on daily folate intake with fortification at different levels for grain products, dairy products, and juices. The Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 mandated USDA to provide the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with information on food consumption patterns of a statistically valid sample of infants and children. The data will be used to determine pesticide tolerance levels to meet the health-based safety standard for pesticide residues in all foods. To meet EPA needs, USDA is currently collecting the Children's Supplemental Survey to supplement the sample size of children in the 1994-96 CSFII.

The data from the 1994-96 CSFII and DHKS have just been released in CD-ROM format. For more information, visit our Home Page at <http://www.barc.usda.gov/bhnrc/foodsurvey/home.htm>.

Endnotes

1. Nutritionist, Food Surveys Research Group, BHNRC, ARS, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
2. Economist, Food Surveys Research Group, BHNRC, ARS, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
3. Nutritionist, Food Surveys Research Group, BHNRC, ARS, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
4. Mathematical Statistician, Food Surveys Research Group, BHNRC, ARS, U.S. Department of Agriculture.