

USDA Introduces MyPlate

— by Karen Brokaw — Brokaw Marketing, Inc.

We all have heard of the food pyramid. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has used this pyramid since 1992 to teach us what we should eat. The USDA changed the pyramid graphics in 2005 to include stairs and a stick person climbing them to encourage us to exercise more. Now, it's out with the pyramid and in with a new graphic called "MyPlate."

The USDA recently released this new image to teach children and adults how to eat more wisely. The most significant change is the simple recommendation: fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. The other half of the plate should be filled with equal portions of grains and protein. The smaller circle above the plate represents dairy. In addition to the portion recommendations, the USDA encourages us to enjoy our food, but to avoid oversized portions.

Where do Soyfoods fit? The MyPlate graphic includes soyfoods in three groups on the graphic. The USDA includes calcium-

fortified soymilk within the "Dairy Group." Additionally, specific language separates soymilk from such calcium-fortified plant foods as cereals, orange juice, rice milk, and almond milk. They provide calcium, but may not provide the other nutrients found in dairy products such as soymilk.

Soyfoods can also be found in the new "Protein" food group, previously labeled the "meat group." Here, soyfoods are included in two categories. First, soybeans are placed within the bean and pea group. A separate Processed Soy Products category lists specific types of soyfoods: tofu, white beans, bean burgers, veggie burgers, tempeh, and texturized vegetable protein. The USDA guidelines encourage consumers to make healthy choices by choosing beans, peas, or soy products as a main dish or a significant part of the meal.



Soyfoods are included again in the vegetable food group. Consumers are encouraged to select more potassium-rich vegetables as sweet potatoes, white potatoes, tomato products, soybeans, lima beans, and spinach. In all, soyfoods are mentioned in three of the five food groups represented on the plate.

What does all this mean to the consumer? "The new plate is much easier to understand and to follow than the old pyramid," says Karen Kuzma, registered dietitian and wellness coach at Hy-Vee in Lincoln, Nebraska. "The USDA has several tips for consumers and most of them mention soyfoods," she says. The tip she believes is most helpful is to make half your plate fruits and vegetables. "This is the area where I see the majority of people falling short on a daily basis, and it is precisely these foods that contain the powerful natural phytonutrients and antioxidants our bodies need to prevent disease," she says. "Fruits and vegetables also tend to be low in calories, so filling half your plate with them is a good way to keep your portions of higher calorie foods in check."

The Soyfoods Association of North America (SANA) has become a national partner with the USDA on this initiative. SANA plans to promote the MyPlate whenever possible. The USDA messages reflecting this new campaign are consistent with the SANA mission of increasing consumption of soy-based foods. Further detailed information about food groups and serving sizes is easily accessible on at www.choosemyplate.gov.