



The History of the USDA

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The History of the USDA Food Recommendations

The USDA Food Pyramid's origins arose from research conducted in agricultural chemistry in the late 1800's.

Wilbur Olin Atwater, Ph. D., was an agricultural chemist who created and controlled the Office of Experiment Stations (OES) for the USDA. He conjured up the first dietary guidelines.

Atwater performed agricultural research, receiving government funds. One of his main interests was human metabolism.

In 1902, Dr. Atwater published a USDA Farmer's Bulletin which emphasized the importance of 1) variety, 2) proportionality, and 3) moderation in healthful eating in the diets of American males.

He stressed the importance of a cheap and efficient diet that included more proteins, beans, and vegetables, and limited the intake of fat, sugar, and other starchy carbohydrates.

In 1917, a new USDA food guide appeared: titled How to Select Foods written by Caroline Hunt, a nutritionist for the USDA.

This guide rejected Dr. Atwater's advice to limit fat and sugar intake, and instead emphasized newly discovered vitamins and minerals: the vitamin era began in about 1911 when Casimir Funk discovered Vitamin B1.

From this time forward it did not take much until the marketing of the association between vitamins and "good health" had a choke-hold on the American public.

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What Happened to Two Million Years (At Least) of Humans' Previous Diet? We really can't know why no one paid any attention to what humans had been eating as the modern kitchen was not much different than the one existing in Roman times.

All that can be said is that the science of agriculture was now in full bloom with many land grant universities beginning to dot the landscape and a whole host of agricultural Ph. Ds. rising as the leaders in providing dietary information to the public.

That the U. S. Department of Agriculture became the default disseminator of nutrition information suggests that agriculture served as the basis of what humans should eat.

[From The Glycation Factor-Greg Ellis](#)