

# THE DEAN'S LETTER FOR TUFTS NUTRITION



IN THIS ISSUE ...

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MERRIGAN NAMED DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE .....	1
HNRCA FINDS NEW LEADER IN MEYDANI .....	1
MICHAEL POLLAN OFFERS OMNIVORE'S SOLUTION ....	2
POLLAN'S SPEECH INSPIRES LOCAVORES .....	2
THIRD ANNUAL GRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE .....	2
ALUMNA TO COMPETE IN NATIONAL COOKING SHOW .....	3
RESEARCH UPDATES .....	3
AWARDS & ACCOLADES ...	4
HERE & THERE .....	4
FRIEDMAN FACULTY IN THE NEWS .....	5
COMING RIGHT UP .....	5

## MERRIGAN NAMED DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

Just a month after President Barack Obama announced **Kathleen Merrigan**, Ph.D., as his nominee for deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, she was confirmed for the USDA's second highest-ranking post by the U.S. Senate. Merrigan, an assistant professor at the Friedman School and director of the Agriculture, Food and Environment program, was sworn in at a Friedman School reception on the Boston campus on April 7 and took over as head of day-to-day operations for the USDA on April 14.

"Kathleen Merrigan is certainly no stranger to this committee, and we welcome her today," said Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) at the nomination hearing on April 1. He expressed confidence in Merrigan's ability to deliver, noting, "She has a strong and diverse background working on many issues in food and agriculture, and [working] to improve opportunities for people in agriculture and in rural communities."

## HNRCA FINDS NEW LEADER IN MEYDANI

Merrigan Professor **Simin Nikbin Meydani**, D.V.M., Ph.D., took over as director of the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (HNRCA) at Tufts on March 16. A senior scientist and director of the Nutritional Immunology Laboratory at the HNRCA, Meydani had served as associate director of the HNRCA for the last four years.

"I look forward to working with Dr. Meydani in this expanded leadership role," said Jamshed Bharucha, provost and senior vice president. "She is a model colleague, maintaining an impressive research program while excelling as an academic leader."

Meydani came to Tufts in 1984, and began researching the effects of nutrients on aging, the immune system response and infection at the HNRCA and teaching at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy.

“Over the last 30 years, research conducted by USDA-HNRCA scientists has helped shape nutrition policy in the United States and abroad,” Meydani said. “I am very excited to have the opportunity to work closely with my colleagues to ensure continuation of high quality research with significant impact for the health of older Americans and those around the world.”

### **MICHAEL POLLAN OFFERS OMNIVORE'S SOLUTION**

“We have a national eating disorder,” author Michael Pollan told an overflow crowd at Tufts as the 10th speaker in the Richard E. Snyder President's Lecture Series on March 24. “We hunger for advice to know how to perform this human activity.”

The author of *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* told the audience that instead of appreciating and enjoying food, we have come to focus on individual nutrients that are often dubbed good or evil, sending us scurrying off in pursuit of one and avoidance of the other.

He described what he called “the American paradox,” namely that we are obsessed with nutrition, yet we have the worst health in the world, with high rates of heart disease and diabetes. “We have created the one diet that reliably makes us sick,” he said. “What an achievement for a civilization.”

### **POLLAN'S SPEECH INSPIRES LOCAVORES**

**Matthew Himmell**, a coordinator for the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP), is taken with one of Michael Pollan's suggestions in particular: Buy your food from local farmers. Doing so, he says, will not only ensure food of superior freshness, it will also support farmers who grow real food, rather than corn and soy, the two main building blocks of the industrial food system.

In addition to making significant contributions to nutrition research and food policy, the farming project is helping to train the next generation of Massachusetts farmers. “Their task will be to create the local, sustainable food system Pollan describes,” Himmell says. “Our job as consumers is to support their efforts.”

To help make buying healthy and sustainable food more convenient, NESFP is offering weekly shares of produce, delivered from its training farm outside of Lowell, Mass., to Tufts' Medford/Somerville and Boston campuses. If you are interested in purchasing a share, email Himmell at [mhimmel@comteam.org](mailto:mhimmel@comteam.org) or call 978-654-6745.

### **THIRD ANNUAL GRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE**

More than 200 people attended the “Future of Food and Nutrition: A Multi-Disciplinary Graduate Research Conference,” which was hosted by the Friedman School on March 28. The conference, planned by 10 Friedman students, provided an opportunity for students to practice presenting original research in a professional setting, collaborate and share

feedback with other students, and network with future colleagues.

Graduate students from 30 colleges, universities and schools of public health—from as far as University College London and Gent University in Belgium—attended, along with representatives from hospitals and health organizations. The students' research covered a range of topics, from labeling and consumer purchasing, to food and nutrition in immigrants households, to new directions for food and farming. A panel discussion on the future of sustainable agriculture featured food systems consultant Susan Roberts, author Mark Winne and Wellesley College professor Robert Paarlberg.

### ALUMNA TO COMPETE IN NATIONAL COOKING SHOW

**Katie Cavuto**, N04, has been selected as a competitor for the Food Network show *The Next Food Network Star*, set to premiere on June 7. The reality-show competition pits 10 chefs against each other in a series of culinary challenges, with the winner receiving his or her own show on the Food Network.

Cavuto is a graduate of the combined dietetic internship program at the Frances Stern Nutrition Center and the Friedman School. She lives in Philadelphia and runs Healthy Bites, a personal chef home delivery service focused on healthy eating. Good luck, Katie!

### RESEARCH UPDATES

A new briefing paper by **Antonio Donini** of the Feinstein International Center finds that humanitarian efforts are endangered in Afghanistan because of the perceived association of aid agencies with the U.S.-led intervention. Building on data collected through interviews in the aid community as well as with Afghan citizens, the report concludes that some humanitarian efforts should be insulated from political and military agendas, or the consequences could be dire for Afghans and the future of humanitarianism worldwide. View or download the report, "Afghanistan: Humanitarianism under Threat," at <http://fic.tufts.edu>.

Associate Professor **Andrew Greenberg**, M.D., director of the Obesity and Metabolism Research Laboratory at the HNRCA, has received a three-year grant from the American Diabetes Association for his research project, "Role of TPL2 in Obesity-associated Inflammation, Hepatic Steatosis and Insulin Resistance."

Professor **Mohsen Meydani**, D.V.M., Ph.D., director of the Vascular Biology Laboratory at the HNRCA, received a five-year subcontract grant from the National Cancer Institute to collaborate with a colleague at the University of Illinois at Chicago on a research project titled "Adiposity and Outcomes of Clinically Localized Prostate Cancer." Meydani also gave the keynote address at the "Whole Grain Global Summit" in New Castle, England, where he spoke on the potential health benefits of avenanthramides of oats.

Professor **Beatrice Rogers**, Ph.D., has just returned from Bolivia, where she initiated the first round of data collection on a new three-country project studying the sustainability of food aid programs after the programs shut down. She is working with graduate student **Kathryn Houk**, N11, who will be traveling with the data collection team for the next month. Assistant Professor **Jennifer Coates**, Ph.D., has just returned from Kenya, where she initiated data

collection for the same project. She is working with **Elizabeth Hackett-Kegode**, J90, N94. Both projects will follow communities for two years after food programs end to determine what implementing agencies can do to ensure the program benefits are sustained. A third project is planned for Honduras, and is expected to start this summer.

## AWARDS & ACCOLADES

**Ashley Colpaart**, N10, has been named one of the 2009 recipients of the Presidential Award for Citizenship and Public Service. Each year Tufts President **Lawrence S. Bacow** presents awards to six undergraduate and six graduate students from across the university. She will receive her award at a ceremony on April 23.

**José Ordovas** has been named the recipient of this year's Friedman School Distinguished Faculty Award. The award will be presented in the Behrakis Auditorium at 4 p.m. on Friday, May 1, to be followed by a celebration in the Jaharis Café. Now in its fourth year, the award recognizes outstanding contributions to the school and its students and is the highest honor bestowed upon a member of the faculty by his or her peers.

The American Society for Nutrition honored Professor **Susan Roberts**, Ph.D., with the E.V. McCollum Award during the 2009 Experimental Biology meeting. The award is given to a clinical investigator who is perceived as a major creative force, actively generating new concepts in nutrition and personally seeing to the execution of studies testing the validity of these concepts.

## HERE & THERE

Adjunct Assistant Professor **Hugh Joseph** gave the Division of Nutrition Science Field Seminar at Cornell University; his topic was "Perspectives on Affordability within Sustainable Food Systems." He also conducted a two-hour workshop for the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County and Cornell University titled "How Food Secure Are Our Tompkins County Communities? Where Should We Focus Our Food Justice Efforts?" While there, he met with the Family Food Decision-making research group headed by Professor Ardyth Gillespie. The trip was sponsored by the Nutrition Graduate Students Organization at Cornell.

### Alumni career panel offers first job advice

On April 6, the Friedman School Alumni Association hosted a career panel titled "The Transition from Tufts." Panelists included: **Jennifer Shea**, N05, MPH05, wellbeing program manager for Shaw's Supermarkets; **Ann Yelmokas McDermott**, Ph.D., N02, director of the Center of Obesity Prevention & Education at California Polytechnic State University; and **Rachel Beckhardt**, N07, project manager for corporate partnerships at the Environmental Defense Fund. If you missed the career panel, it is available at [alumni.nutrition.tufts.edu](http://alumni.nutrition.tufts.edu).

### Fruits, veggies and kids

Lorelei DiSogra, vice president of nutrition and health for the United Fresh Produce Association, gave the keynote address at the Friedman School's All-Alumni Reunion on Sunday, April 5. You can hear her talk, titled "Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Programs: A Global Strategy for Increasing Children's Fruit & Vegetable Consumption," at

alumni.nutrition.tufts.edu

## FRIEDMAN FACULTY IN THE NEWS

In an Associated Press article, Professor **Jeanne Goldberg**, Ph.D., offered her expertise to help consumers evaluate nutrition information on the Web. Among her tips: Sites with the extensions .edu and .gov generally have unbiased information, but .com sites can be more user-friendly.

*Reader's Digest* reported on research by **Bess Dawson-Hughes**, M.D., which found alkaline supplements lowered the amount of calcium that study volunteers excreted by 20 percent. She said you can get the same bone-shielding benefit by eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer carbohydrates.

Commenting on a German study that found fish oil does not enhance the benefit of heart drugs, Professor **Alice Lichtenstein**, D.Sc., said it shows we need to be cautious about predicting the benefits of any nutritional supplements. "We see this pattern—people are so willing to embrace the simple answer," she told the Associated Press, as if it's possible "to crack a capsule over a hot fudge sundae" and undo the harm of bad diets and lack of exercise.

In a *New York Times* article on the nation's fascination with Michelle Obama's toned arms, Associate Professor **Miriam Nelson**, Ph.D., said she finds the first lady an excellent fitness role model, particularly for women over 40. "I can tell you over and over again, whether it's women 45, 65 or 85, when they do strength training and see the results, one of the first things they like to do is wear sleeveless shirts," she said. "They are proud of their body."

## COMING RIGHT UP

### D.C. policy event co-sponsored with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

On Monday, June 1, the Friedman School will partner with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for an event at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., titled **Children's Health: The Future of Food and Nutrition Policy**. Dean **Eileen Kennedy** and Gail Christopher, the Kellogg Foundation's vice president of programs, will lead the program. **Christina Economos**, Ph.D., N96, the New Balance Chair in Childhood Nutrition, will discuss "Childhood Obesity: Are We Getting Anywhere? Where Do We Go from Here?" Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D., professor of biostatistics and epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, will speak on "Limitations or Failures of Current Policies as They Relate to Health Disparities." Mary Story, Ph.D., professor of epidemiology and community health at the University of Minnesota, will look at "Nutrition Standards and Competitive Foods: Impact on Children." Cathy Wotecki, Ph.D., global director of scientific affairs for Mars Inc., will speak on the "Impact of Private-Public Partnerships." **Patrick Webb**, Ph.D., the dean for academic affairs at the Friedman School, will tackle "Global Food Policy." Sally Squires, senior vice president and director of health and wellness for Weber Shandwick, will serve as provocateur and Q&A session leader. Please save the date for what promises to be an insightful look at some of the most pressing health and nutrition

policy issues facing Congress and the Obama administration.

The deadline for the next issue of the *Dean's Letter for Tufts Nutrition* is Wednesday, May 27. Please send your submissions to Julie Flaherty at [julie.flaherty@tufts.edu](mailto:julie.flaherty@tufts.edu).