

# THE DEAN'S LETTER FOR TUFTS NUTRITION



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## WALK THE WALK

Can exercise stave off the aging process? That's the question Tufts researchers hope to answer in a new six-year study on how physical activity affects the health of older people.

Led by Professor Led by Professor **Roger Fielding**, Ph.D., scientists at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (HNRCA) at Tufts will share a

two-year, \$29.5 million federal grant with colleagues at eight other research institutions to initiate the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) study. The clinical trial will ultimately follow 1,600 senior citizens over six years to determine whether a structured exercise program can prevent major mobility disability—defined as the inability to walk a quarter mile—in elders.

The study, which will be the longest-running research on exercise and older adults ever conducted, will allow scientists to study the effects of physical activity on other aspects of health and well-being in seniors, including cognitive function. For example, the research will attempt to determine if routine exercise can prevent depression and stave off dementia., Ph.D., scientists at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (HNRCA) at Tufts will share a two-year, \$29.5 million federal grant with colleagues at eight other research institutions to initiate the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) study. The clinical trial will ultimately follow 1,600 senior citizens over six years to determine whether a structured exercise program can prevent major mobility disability—defined as the inability to walk a quarter mile—in elders.

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## AT THE MOVIES WITH A CE-YO

Ah, humble beginnings. Asked how Stonyfield Farm has managed to grow as a company and still maintain its product quality, founder Gary Hirshberg joked that quality was "iffy" when they were just a seven-cow operation. "We used to make yogurt drinks," he said, "but

we weren't trying to make yogurt drinks."

Today Stonyfield, which was acquired by Group Danone in 2003 but is still run by chairman, president and "CE-Yo" Hirshberg, is a \$340 million company. Yet, "we're still only 3.5 percent" of the market, he said, an organic drop in the global yogurt bucket.

Hirshberg visited the Friedman School in September to attend a special screening of *Food, Inc.*, a documentary that takes a critical look at the food system's negative effects on the health of people and the environment. He also responded to questions from students and faculty.

Associate Professor **Timothy Griffin**, Ph.D., director of the **Agriculture, Food and Environment Program**, said *Food, Inc.* jibes well with the issues he covers in the classroom. "I realize now I can show the film and save my students about nine hours of lecture," he said. As grim as the film's depiction of food production is, both Griffin and Hirshberg said there is reason for optimism. "The landscape going forward looks a lot different than even three or four years ago," Griffin said.

Hirshberg pointed out that "100 percent of food was organic until World War II."

"We got into this little cul de sac through a series of steps," he said, and if we are to get out, "it's going to be through small steps."

For consumers, a first move would be to vote for organic food with their supermarket dollars. "The biggest barriers [to changing to organic methods] are on the demand side, not the supply side," Hirshberg said, emphasizing that farmers are generally adaptive and resourceful. "The farmer is saying 'Tell us what you want us to grow.' "

## RESEARCH UPDATES

Assistant Professors **Paul Giguere**, Ed.D., and **Robert Houser**, Ph.D., have received a grant from the National Science Foundation, in collaboration with Rice University, to continue developing an online course in statistics. The goal of the project, titled "Online Statistics Education: An Interactive Multimedia Course of Study II," is to develop multimedia-enhanced chapters addressing various topics in statistics, including simulations and demonstrations, case studies and statistical calculators. Although primarily designed for the teaching/learning of statistics at an introductory college-level, the online course will also function as a tool for any student who may need remedial help with specific concepts in statistics.

## AWARDS & ACCOLADES

**Christina Economos**, Ph.D., was honored in October by the New England Healthcare Institute with an "Innovator in Health Award." The award was established to celebrate the achievements of leaders who exemplify the spirit of innovation and collaboration and who have advanced the understanding, connectivity or delivery of health care. In particular, Economos was recognized for designing and launching the Shape Up Somerville project and for her current work in urban and rural communities throughout the United States, demonstrating that rigorous, evidence-based methods can be used to effectively attack the

crisis of childhood obesity. A photo of her with Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick at the event appeared in the *Boston Globe*.

**Lindsey Toth**, a dietetic intern at the Frances Stern Nutrition Center, entered the American Dietetic Association 2009 Journal Cover Photo Contest and has been picked as one of five runners up for this national contest. If she wins, the photograph she took will appear on the cover of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

## HERE & THERE

The John Hancock Center for Physical Activity and Nutrition at Tufts University has changed its name to the **John Hancock Research Center on Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity Prevention** (JHRC). The name change reflects the center's increasing engagement in research and policy focused on obesity prevention. Learn more about the JHRC at the center's new website: [jhrc.nutrition.tufts.edu](http://jhrc.nutrition.tufts.edu).

National Public Radio featured the Friedman School's **New Entry Sustainable Farming Project** in separate stories on both its *Here and Now* and *Morning Edition* shows. The magazine *Farmers' Market Today* also chronicled the NESFP's mission to help immigrants grow and sell traditional foods from their homelands. The project's director, **Jennifer Hashley**, spoke with the magazine *Edible Boston* for an article about the Mobile Poultry Processing Unit project, which provides important infrastructure for local livestock producers.

**Venkatesh Iyengar**, D.Sc., Ph.D., an adjunct professor, was invited to speak at the International Congress of Nutrition in Bangkok in October. The title of his talk was "Applied Metrology for Strengthening Food and Nutritional Measurements: Ways, Means and Outcomes." Iyengar also will give an invited talk, "Food Safety Security: An Open-ended Issue," at the 2009 annual meeting of the Nutrition Society of India in Hyderabad this month.

Instructor and registered dietitian **Helen Rasmussen**, Ph.D., was an invited speaker at the 22nd Harvard-Radcliffe Women's Leadership Conference at the Kennedy School of Government. She spoke about nutrition, alcohol intake and wellness in women.

Professor **Katherine Tucker**, Ph.D., will be leaving the Friedman School to become professor and chair of the Department of Health Services in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences at Northeastern University. Tucker, who has been a scientist at the HNRCA since 1990, has also been director of the graduate program in nutritional epidemiology at the Friedman School since 1997.

Professor **Xiang-Dong Wang**, Ph.D., was one of three speakers from the United States invited to the 10th Brazilian Congress of the Food and Nutrition Society in September in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He gave presentations on "Carotenoids and Cancer Prevention" and on "Alcohol, High-fat Diet and Inflammation." Wang has also been awarded an administrative supplemental grant under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 from the National Cancer Institute. The award supports his study on the effects of tomato extract vs. purified lycopene supplementation against cancer development. Wang is also an elected vice chair of the Gordon Research Conference on Carotenoids, which will take place in January in Ventura, Calif.

Associate Professor **Parke Wilde**, Ph.D., was a scholar-in-residence at the Institute of Social Sciences at Cornell University from October 5–9. He gave one presentation on the "Economics of the Thrifty Food Plan" and another on the "Dynamics of Household Food Insecurity in the United States during a Five Year Period." Wilde's weekly class on U.S. food policy at the Friedman School was replaced by an unusual cross-university teleconference, broadcast from Mann Library at Cornell to the Boston campus at Tufts. For the teleconference, Parke interviewed Cornell professor and World Food Prize Laureate Per Pinstrup-Andersen on the topic of U.S. food policy in a global context.

### FRIEDMAN FACULTY IN THE NEWS

Professor **Roger Fielding**, Ph.D., was quoted in the London *Guardian* newspaper about the accuracy of data (speed, calories burned) produced by exercise machines. "There is often a 20 percent difference in the speed the machine tells you it is going and the speed it is actually moving," he said. "This can create a 20 percent mismatch in the number of calories being burned."

Professor **Alice Lichtenstein**, D.Sc., responded to a recent *New York Times* article questioning whether school bake sales should be banned. Her published letter to the editor read: "While trying to limit excess snacking during the school day, the emphasis on sugar and fat misses the important issue and unintentionally serves to perpetuate a misconception about food and body weight. The major challenge to avoiding excess weight gain at any age is overconsumption of calories, whether the calories come from fat, carbohydrate (sugar or starch) or protein."

For an article on the *U.S. News & World Report* website, Professor **José Ordovas**, Ph.D., said there is plenty of promise in nutritional genomics, but cautioned against believing that the gene tests now available are meaningful in trying to understand an individual's response to food. "We have to be very careful," he said. "We need to create a new science that's solid."

Professor **Susan Roberts**, Ph.D., was quoted in a *New York Times Magazine* article devoted to CALERIE, the calorie restriction study being conducted at Tufts and two other universities. "Here there are really three things we want to know," she said. "The first is, can we really implement human caloric restriction? The second is, can we really implement it in a way that doesn't neglect the biology? People can't walk around hungry, so is hunger a necessary part of the biology of calorie restriction? The third is, are there unacceptable side effects that you wouldn't pick up in animals that you would pick up in humans?...The goal of the trial is to see if this is ready for prime time."

In an Associated Press article about the popularity of fresh-squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, Associate Professor **Edward Saltzman**, M.D., debunked some of the more extravagant claims that such juices detoxify organs and cleanse the digestive tract. "I honestly don't understand the concept of intestinal cleansing. It's not like you'd find old tin cans or spare tires in the colon," he said. "Anything that results in increased motility or movement in the intestines, such as intake of fiber and fluid, would result in the evacuation of bowel contents."

In an op-ed published in the *Boston Globe*, Assistant Professor **Andrew Wilder**, Ph.D.,

outlined the mounting difficulties of supplying humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. "Instead of winning hearts and minds, Afghan perceptions of aid and aid actors are overwhelmingly negative," he wrote. "And instead of contributing to stability, in many cases aid is contributing to conflict and instability."

The deadline for the next issue of the *Dean's Letter for Tufts Nutrition* is Tuesday, November 24. Please send your submissions to Julie Flaherty at [julie.flaherty@tufts.edu](mailto:julie.flaherty@tufts.edu).