

International

# Food Information

Council



2021

ANNUAL REPORT



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# LETTER FROM THE CEO

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I'm pleased to present IFIC's Annual Report for 2021, a year in which IFIC reached millions of consumers and health professionals with evidence-based information on food and health, expanded our educational programming

and further diversified our consumer research as we tracked evolving attitudes toward food, including the continued impact of COVID.

Even more relevant for IFIC and our mission to elevate the science behind our food, newly published Pew Research Center data shows continuing erosion in public trust in science and scientific institutions. For all of us at IFIC, many of whom are trained experts in health, nutrition and food safety, erosion of public trust in scientists, public health and medical professionals has been a reminder about the importance and relevance of this organization's evidence-based communications mission around food.

Consumers make food choices in a complex information environment influenced by a variety of sources, from national media and preferred social channels, to friends, family and health professionals. IFIC's own research has revealed the extent to which consumers trust and rely on these various sources for information about their food. As a result, every educational tool that IFIC produces, whether for consumers or health professionals, is carefully constructed to build trust in the best available data, evidence and science about the safety of our food and its impact on our health.

This report offers highlights of IFIC's programs and accomplishments over the past year. You will learn about our research program that enables us to understand the food consumer more deeply than any other organization. You will see how we're translating that understanding into actionable information for the member companies that support our mission, the regulatory agencies that value our data, and the health professionals that play such a crucial role in improving nutritional outcomes. And finally, you will better understand IFIC's success in creatively sharing evidence-based food information with consumers, growing our connection with them through traditional and social communications strategies.

To those of you who support IFIC's mission and work with us in this science-challenged environment, we offer our thanks and appreciation. For those who value the role of evidence in food decisions and trust in food science, we invite you to reach out to learn more about our unique programs to promote the science of nutrition, food safety and agriculture.

**JOSEPH CLAYTON**

## ABOUT IFIC

**T**he International Food Information Council (IFIC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to effectively communicate science-based information about health, nutrition, food safety and agriculture. For over three decades, IFIC has been informing global audiences about the evidence behind our food system. We serve as a gathering place for academic, government and private industry experts to independently evaluate scientific questions relating to the entire food system, from initial production to the end consumer.

IFIC is committed to promoting scientific integrity. The resources we create are derived from peer-reviewed science and the work of authoritative bodies including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, as well as the European Food Safety Authority. Our

“**We envision a global environment where credible science drives food policy and consumer choice.**”

work reaches millions of consumers every year, challenging pervasive food myths and elevating credible science. In addition, IFIC’s consumer research is relied upon by journalists, health and nutrition professionals, and government officials for insights into consumer beliefs and behaviors.

IFIC is staffed primarily by nutrition, food safety and communications experts and governed by a Board of Trustees, a majority of whom are independent academic researchers. Our work is supported by grants and contributions from the private sector. IFIC does not represent any company, industry or product. We advocate for the best available evidence in support of food decisions.



# UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S FOOD CONSUMERS

IFIC's consumer research program was especially active in 2021, with 14 projects conducted across a wide range of topics, including the continuing impact of COVID on food-related behaviors and decisions. To further support our research related to the impact of the pandemic, IFIC also deployed "tracking surveys" this year, specifically designed to better understand changes of consumer attitudes over time on a common set of questions. Here is a summary of our consumer research work.

## THE 2021 FOOD AND HEALTH SURVEY

IFIC's flagship [Food and Health Survey](#) marked its 16th consecutive year in 2021. This annual research initiative gathers consumer insights on how Americans connect food and food-purchasing decisions to their physical health and overall well-being, offering fresh perspectives on how they navigate the complicated food landscape. IFIC's subject matter experts in nutrition, food safety and agriculture use the findings of this survey to better understand what consumers are thinking about their food and how IFIC's education and communications programs can best be structured and delivered across channels. Each year, IFIC summarizes our latest findings in customized research briefings to our supporters, our trustees and the broader community of academic institutions and NGOs that share our interest in the intersection of food and health.

In 2021, the pandemic continued to be front-and-center in our lives, and that fact was reflected in

the Food and Health Survey, which delved into the influence of the pandemic across diverse issues like snacking habits, interest in immune health, food security and e-commerce.

This year's edition also examined perennial issues in health and nutrition, including trends in diets and eating patterns; perceptions of food production methods and food labeling; and attitudes about food safety. New for this year, the survey also explored topics like what "healthy" really means to Americans, and how perceptions of environmental and social sustainability impact our food choices.



## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

This year, IFIC collaborated with our members and external organizations on a variety of new research initiatives. Partnerships with SNI Global/United Soybean Board and the International Dairy Foods Association yielded new insights on [nomenclature for plant-based meat alternatives](#) and [dairy and yogurt](#), respectively.

We also developed a [survey](#) with IFIC member Abbott that examined the unique priorities and challenges parents and caregivers face when feeding their young children.

A number of IFIC members also collaborated on research to better understand consumer attitudes, preferences and beliefs relating to front-of-package (FOP) nutrition labeling. [IFIC's in-depth analysis](#) explored consumer perspectives on FOP nutritional labeling, points of confusion, and opportunities to improve food labels to benefit consumers.



## HIGHLIGHTS OF IFIC'S BROADER RESEARCH AGENDA



Consumption Trends, Preferred Names and Perceptions of Plant-Based Meat Alternatives



From "Chemical-Sounding" to "Clean": Consumer Perspectives on Food Ingredients



Perceptions and Use of Dietary Sweeteners in 2021



Consumer Perspectives on Vitamins, Minerals, and Food and Beverage Fortification



Perceptions on Processed: Consumer Sentiment and Purchasing Habits

# SUPPORTING FOOD REGULATION WITH DATA AND EVIDENCE

## COMMENTS TO REGULATORY AGENCIES

In 2021, we drew upon our research and expertise to help inform federal agency regulatory decisions through special briefings for agency staff and a wide range of written submissions, or “public comments,” designed to share relevant data and information. In addition to holding research briefings for agency staff and our Public Liaisons, IFIC submitted the following public comments in 2021:

- Jul. 6, to the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA), on proposed research to study the impact of a “healthy” nutrient content claim on packaged foods
- Sept. 22, to [Health Canada](#), on its “[Proposed regulations on supplemented foods](#),” which could change the regulation of certain ingredients and components added to foods
- Nov. 18, to the [FDA](#), regarding its “[New Era of Smarter Food Safety Summit on E-Commerce: Ensuring the Safety of Foods Ordered and Delivered Directly to Consumers](#)”
- Dec. 1, to the [USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service](#) (FSIS), on the labeling of products comprised of or containing cultured cells derived from meat or poultry, using information from IFIC’s 2020 survey “[Plant and Animal Protein Choices: Consumer Viewpoints and Purchasing Behaviors](#)”

For decades, federal regulators have been coming to IFIC for our unique insights into consumer values and behaviors that can help inform their decision-making. We are proud to play a part in ensuring that food decisions by policymakers are based on the best evidence, and we welcome collaboration with government agencies in the pursuit of better science communications.



# COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE SCIENCE OF FOOD

## COMMUNICATIONS PARTNERSHIPS

IFIC's science communications mission frequently overlaps with the work federal agencies do to inform consumers on key topics relating to their food. Throughout 2021, IFIC collaborated with government agencies, academia and media outlets to raise the visibility of the science behind bioengineered foods, best practices in food safety and other topics where gaps may exist in consumer understanding of the science on a particular question. A few examples are below:

- IFIC teamed up with the FDA on Oct. 14 for a Facebook Live event. IFIC's Tamika Sims, Ph.D., FDA's Carrie McMahon, Ph.D., and IFIC Board of Trustees Co-Chair Regan Bailey, Ph.D led a conversation on GMOs in the U.S. food supply. The one-hour event included questions from viewers that government, academic and IFIC experts answered in real-time.
- In observance of World Food Safety day on June 11, IFIC took part in a Twitter chat with the Codex Alimentarius, a joint food standards program of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization. The hour-long chat — which included USDA, FDA and other public health experts — reached 5.4 million users. The conversation centered around food safety in a post-pandemic world.



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

EVERYDAY  HEALTH™



World Health  
Organization



- IFIC partnered with Everyday Health twice in 2021. We discussed the role diet plays in maintaining a healthy immune system and the role mindful eating plays in coping with stress.
- IFIC engaged with both the USDA and FDA in March to learn more about regulatory considerations for cultured meat, poultry and seafood. Officials from both agencies presented a webinar to IFIC stakeholders.
- Over the summer, IFIC hosted monthly conversations with food science communicators at USDA, FDA, CDC and Health Canada to learn about each agency's consumer education priorities and see how our community could assist with disseminating their latest science messaging.
- IFIC collaborated with the Partnership for Food Safety Education to stress the importance of consumer food safety practices during World Food Safety Day and Food Safety Education Month.

## DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS

The release of the 2020–2025 [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (DGAs) was a watershed moment for food guidance to help Americans adopt more healthful eating patterns and achieve more positive health outcomes. IFIC had its finger on the pulse of the DGAs, from their development over the course of the previous five years to their release at the end of 2020. After the DGAs were issued, we began 2021 by creating new resources to educate consumers on the latest recommendations and changes from past editions. IFIC's experts provided a consumer-friendly [summary](#) of the DGAs, outlining what changed in the new edition and what stayed the same. Other resources included new information about [healthy dietary patterns](#) and [healthy aging](#). Additionally, IFIC hosted a panel with four members of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee – including DGAC Chair and IFIC Trustee Barbara Schneeman, Ph.D. – describing the various approaches the Committee used to establish their recommendations, the most significant changes from the previous Guidelines, and what topics might be addressed in the next version.



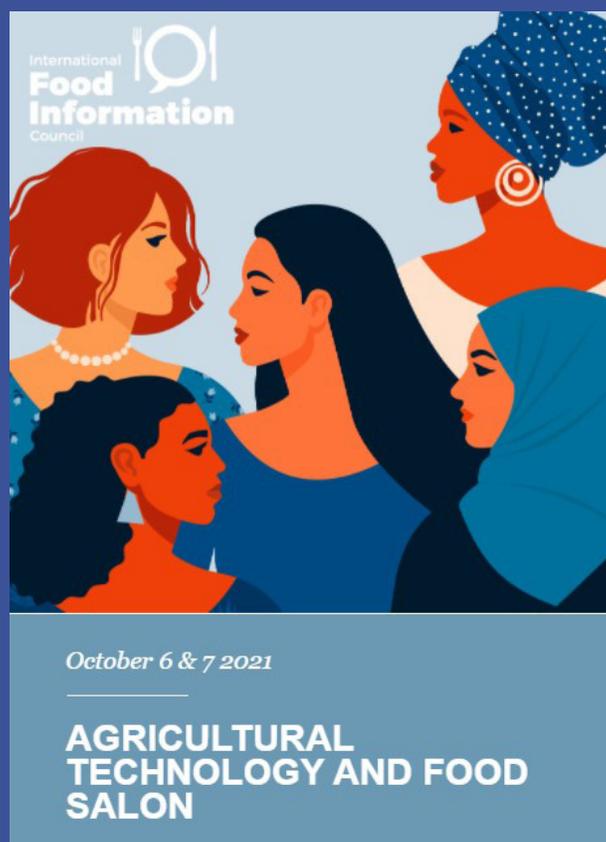
# WORKING WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

## CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

**F**or nearly two decades, IFIC has been an approved provider of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) through the Commission on Dietetic Registration, the credentialing arm of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. We are continually seeking opportunities to share expert knowledge with our network of health professionals, and in 2021 we expanded our CPE programming for registered dietitians with 9.5 CPE credit hours of new, highly rated, live learning events and self-study activities that collectively reached more than 1,600 health professionals.

IFIC's live learning events, including those produced in 2021 such as the "Agricultural Technology and Food Salon," "Food Psychology and the Role of Low-Calorie Sweeteners in Appetite and Weight Control," and "Myths and Facts about Caffeine Safety: An Expert Evaluation of the Current Science," have received an overall attendee satisfaction rating of 9.15 out of 10. IFIC also offers a series of self-study activities, including new additions in 2021 on Monk Fruit Sweeteners, Stevia Sweeteners and Sucralose.

All these resources and more can be found on [the education page](#) of our website.



# SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVES

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## CONTENT AND INFORMATION FROM FARM TO FORK

Our in-house experts work every day with stakeholders from government, academia, the nonprofit sector and industry to communicate answers to the big questions facing food producers and consumers. With an established expertise in the fields of communications, consumer research, nutrition science, and food safety, IFIC staff share evidence on a broad range of topics. Our diverse team applies its knowledge and expertise to produce science-based resources that inform a wide range of audiences, including consumers, health professionals, and the broader nutrition and food-safety communities.

We promote evidence of the

safety and efficacy of food production practices, nutrients, ingredients and additives through a variety of special communications initiatives each year. We also create educational content around eating patterns and diets, and elevate the scientific evidence behind healthy eating behaviors. Here are just some of our highlights from 2021.





## AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY AND FOOD SALON

In celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child, IFIC hosted the “Agricultural Technology and Food Salon” on Oct. 6 and 7, an event that showcased the contributions women are making to the fields of public health, agriculture, biotechnology and nutrition.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Dr. Jewel Bronaugh delivered opening remarks, discussing the impacts of climate change on the food supply. Other speakers included Alyssa Whitcraft, Ph.D., who uses NASA satellite technology to support agricultural terrain monitoring, and Meera Shekar, Ph.D., who leads

the World Bank’s efforts to fight malnutrition associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event hosted more than 500 attendees — IFIC members, registered dietitians, government officials, academics, graduate students, industry stakeholders and public health professionals — with a global audience from countries including Canada, Kenya, Peru, Japan and Argentina. We were extremely pleased to reach so many opinion leaders and professionals within the food system with the facts on safe and sustainable food production and how women contribute to a more modern food system.

## “UNDERSTANDING OUR FOOD” INITIATIVE

IFIC’s “Understanding our Food” initiative celebrated the fifth anniversary of the “Process This” campaign. Similar to past iterations, the goal of the 2021 campaign was to inform and educate on the nutritional and safety benefits of modern food production. The effort focused on a recent trend influencing a growing number of food and beverage decisions: sustainability concerns. In order to impact consumer conversations around this topic, this year’s messages addressed environmentally friendly products, eco-friendly packaging, regenerative agriculture and practices contribute to reduce food waste.

Our research also uncovered knowledge gaps among consumers about fortification and ingredient safety, which drove the development of new videos and consumer resources on vitamin D and fiber fortification, as well as caffeine, sugar alternatives and whole grains.

Myths and misinformation around processed foods and modern food production are an unfortunate part of the dialogue. But IFIC is committed to its mission of evidence-based science communication, and the Understanding our Food initiative is one more way we are countering misconceptions and educating consumers.

## INTERNATIONAL PLATFORMS

Providing science-based information to the broadest possible audience is part of IFIC's mission. As such, we translate the resources on our content hub, FoodInsight.org, into Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, allowing speakers of those languages to access our food safety and nutrition content. We upload new articles, fact sheets and infographics weekly onto our two international microsites that have attracted over 400,000 visitors in 2021.

## CAFFEINE RESOURCE

IFIC's [Everything Caffeine](#) website is a "one-stop-shop" for consumers to learn about healthy caffeine consumption and food-safety facts. Filled with engaging resources, such as our [Caffeine Calculator](#) and our [Caffeine IQ Quiz](#), the site is continuously updated with resources about caffeinated beverages and foods to guide visitors along a healthful path. In combination with our new social partner, the College Nutritionist, these caffeine resources reached nearly 1 million social media users in 2021, and were featured in online editions of *EatingWell*, *the Healthy*, and *Reader's Digest*.



[FAQ](#) [WHAT IS CAFFEINE?](#) [CAFFEINE AND YOU](#) [SAFETY & HEALTH](#) [SOURCES & AMOUNTS](#) [RESEARCH](#) [BLOG](#) [ABOUT US](#)

THE GO-TO RESOURCE FOR

# Everything Caffeine

WHAT IS **Caffeine**

CAFFEINE **Safety & Health**

LATEST **Research**

## 2021 BY THE NUMBERS



3.8  
million  
web visits

75  
new articles on  
foodinsight.org



1.1  
million  
social media  
interactions

17 research studies  
conducted

550,000  
social media  
followers

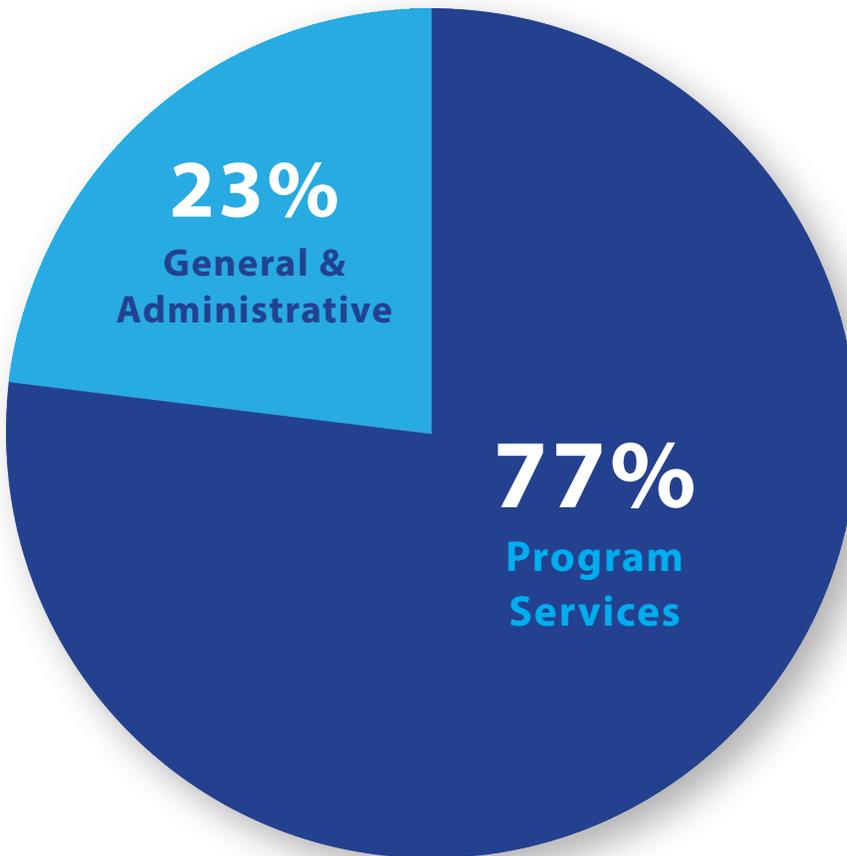


621,794  
video views

68  
articles  
translated  
into Brazilian  
Portuguese

66  
articles  
translated  
into Spanish

## FINANCIALS



Numbers derived from the audit of IFIC's consolidated financial statements comprising of activities, functional expenses and cash flows for the year ended December 31, 2020. Additional information on IFIC's financials are publicly available at [IFIC.org](https://www.ific.org)



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United States Department of Agriculture

### **John Finley**

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Agricultural Research Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

### **Janelle Gunn**

Associate Director of Policy, Partnership and  
Communication  
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity  
United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### **Christopher Waldrop**

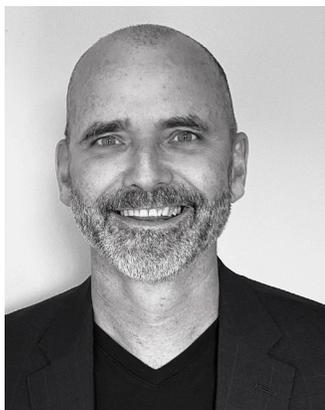
Senior Health Scientist  
Division of Public Health Informatics and Analytics  
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
United States Food & Drug Administration

### **William Yan, Ph.D.**

Director, Bureau of Nutritional Sciences  
Food Directorate of Health Canada



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