

PYRAMID SCHEME

by JIM FISCHER

Most beekeepers' trucks are littered with the debris of fast-food meals grabbed on the drive between yards, so many that a significant percentage of smokers are lit with scraps of paper torn from burger bags. Face it, we eat what we can, when we can. At least we all get a good workout lifting boxes full of bees and honey.

Here at Farmageddon, beekeepers eat well. Today's breakfast featured homemade English Muffins topped with comb honey. It was while enjoying breakfast that I read a news article about a new USDA food pyramid. This had to be a good thing. The increasingly large percentage of increasingly large Americans has been blamed on the emphasis on a "low fat diet" pushed by prior USDA dietary guidelines. ("Low fat" made for tasteless food, so High-Fructose Corn Syrup was added to nearly everything except shampoo, with predictable results.) The USDA has been working to make their guidelines less complicated and easier to follow, and this was the result of their efforts.

But the new guidelines apparently came from ad men rather than the learned scholars of medical science - each food group now has its own slogan:

Grains - "Make half your grains whole"

Vegetables - "Vary your veggies"

Fruit - "Focus on fruits"

Milk - "Get your calcium-rich foods"
Meat & Beans - "Go lean on protein"
Oils - "Know your fats"

The USDA paid Porter Novelli, the international marketing firm, \$2.5 million for this stuff. I'd stop payment on the check if I ran the USDA.

You might be wondering where honey fits into the new scheme.

It doesn't.

The only mention of honey is in a long list of "added sugars". What the USDA says about these "added sugars" is not very complementary:

"Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added to foods or beverages during processing or preparation. This does not include naturally occurring sugars such as those that occur in milk and fruits."

Gee, thanks guys - cows STILL get into two food groups, "meat", and "milk", while bees don't even get credit for making a "naturally occurring sugar". To add insult to injury, cows get credit for naturally occurring sugars in milk!

The USDA was also apparently jealous of the Department of Homeland Security's Terror Threat Advisory color-code system. The USDA color-coded the food groups to match. Grains are orange, vegetables are green, fruits are red, oils are yellow, milk is blue, and meat is purple. (Around here, blue milk and purple meat would go straight to the compost pile, but at least they used green for vegetables.) See the graphics, which will help you to compare the color code systems. Note that Sesame Street originated the concept.

The new pyramid is very different from the old one. The old pyramid had big bricks at the bottom, and smaller bricks at the top, a sensible design. The healthy foods were the larger bricks at the bottom, forming the "foundation of a sensible diet", but everyone apparently wanted to be "at the top". Amazingly, no one involved has realized yet that pyramids were tombs - not the best choice of symbols to use in promoting healthy lifestyles.

The new pyramid lets everything be at the top. The result isn't really a pyramid at



Fig. 1 - Sesame Street Characters



Fig. 2 - Homeland Security



Fig. 3 - USDA Food Groups

all any more - it's a triangular pie chart. There are 12 different versions with slightly different widths for the various colored slices. The mypyramid.gov website will pick out one for you based upon your age, sex, and how much you exercise. Funny, they don't ask about height and weight, so even though there are 12 different pyramids, I get the same dietary advice given to a 300 pound couch potato. Are there really a dozen different basic types of lifestyle out there? I think we



Fig. 4 - Old USDA Food Pyramid



Fig. 5 - New USDA My Pyramid

might be able to simplify the demographics down to “active”, “sofa spud”, and “deceased”.

The little man climbing the poorly-drawn stairs is not Indiana Jones searching the pyramids for relics. The man is climbing stairs to remind you that exercise is an important part of your dietary plan. For most people, this would require them to move their fridge upstairs.

Pie... triangle... slices... I just realized what the new pyramid reminds me of - a pizza!! In fact, I can satisfy all the USDA guidelines by eating nothing but pizza.



Fig. 6 - Pizza — The Perfect Meal

The crust contains my “grains”, the mushrooms and sauce are my “vegetables”, and the cheese is my “milk”. For “fruit”, I can add pineapple, and the pepperoni provides both my “meat” and my “oils”. Not only does it meet USDA guidelines, if they don't deliver in 30 minutes, it's free.

James Fischer keeps bees in Virginia, and is firmly convinced that jelly doughnuts are an important part of the grains food group.

