



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY
2105 FIRST AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404 USA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 22, 2005

Contact: Ben Lilliston, 612-870-3416, blilliston@iatp.org,
David Wallinga, MD, 612-870-3418, dwallinga@iatp.org

USDA Food Pyramid Clashes with FDA/EPA Safe Fish Recommendations

Pyramid Ignores Mercury Health Risks for Swordfish, Other Fish

Minneapolis – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s new Food Pyramid released earlier this week recommends certain fish that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agree should not be eaten at all by young children and women of childbearing age due to mercury contamination.

“Not only does the new Food Pyramid shirk away from telling the public which unhealthy foods to avoid,” said David Wallinga, MD, Director of IATP's Food and Health Program, “it actually tells people to eat fish that other federal agencies warn are too contaminated with mercury to eat.”

The Food Pyramid lists mackerel, swordfish and fresh tuna as recommendations within a daily allowance of meat, bean, nuts and fish. But in March 2004, the FDA/EPA's joint fish consumption advisory advises specifically against ANY consumption of swordfish and king mackerel due to their high levels of mercury contamination. The advisory applies to all women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children.

For a 35-year old active woman, the Food Pyramid would recommend eating 6 ounces per day of foods from the meat, bean, nuts and fish group. But eating even a single 6 ounce serving of fresh tuna or canned albacore tuna also would push women and children far beyond what EPA would advise as a maximum amount of mercury *for that week, let alone for the day*.

An average woman of childbearing age eating a 6 ounce serving of swordfish according to the Food Pyramid would get about:

- 28 times higher than the EPA reference dose for a maximum recommended daily dose of methylmercury, and roughly
- 4 times higher than the EPA reference dose for a maximum recommended weekly dose of methylmercury.

If the same woman ate a six ounce serving of fresh tuna (with a mean mercury level of 0.38 ppm, per FDA monitoring data), she would get:

- More than 10 times the maximum amount of methylmercury ingested that EPA recommends for one day; and
- More than 1.5 times as much methylmercury as the EPA recommends for the week.

“Fish are good food when they’re not contaminated with mercury and other industrial pollutants,” says Wallinga. “The USDA’s Food Pyramid needs to tell people – and especially women and children – which fish to avoid, as well as which fish to eat.”

To read a further breakdown of how the Food Pyramid conflicts with EPA/FDA recommendations on fish, go to:

<http://www.environmentalobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=72767>.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works globally to promote resilient family farms, communities and ecosystems through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.