If Every American Tried to Eat According to the Dietary Guidelines, Could They?

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BACKGROUND

The mission of the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and application of childhood obesity research. To have measurable impact, research findings need to reach and resonate with the individuals and institutions that can drive change.

Through NCCOR, FHI 360 used digital and social media to translate and disseminate research applications of the Healthy Eating Index-2010 (HEI-2010), highlighting changes needed to enable healthier food choices for all Americans and reduce childhood obesity in the United States for researchers, practitioners, and decision makers.

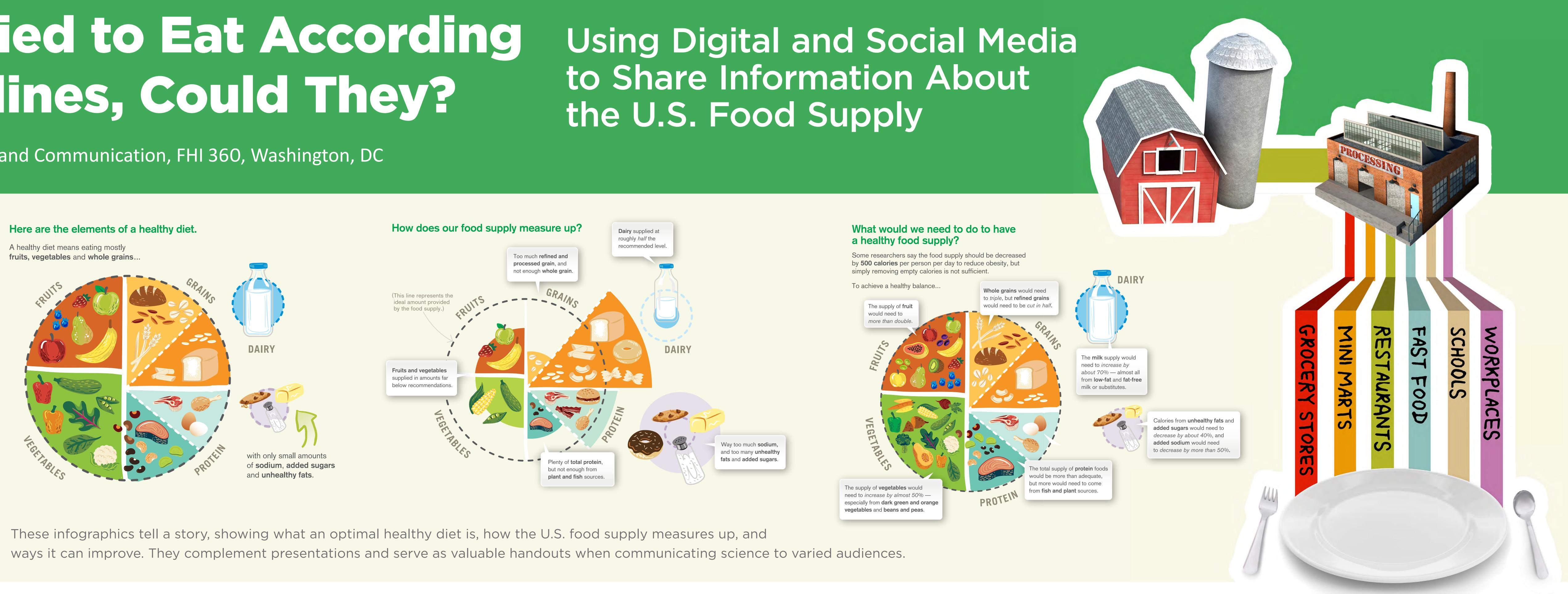
This effort is an example of how innovative communication tools can help researchers transmit research findings beyond scientific journal articles and conferences.



PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The HEI-2010 is a scoring metric developed by scientists at two of NCCOR's funding partners: the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Applied Research Program, part of the National Institutes of Health. It measures how closely an eating pattern or mix of foods matches the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations.





A strength of the HEI is that it is a versatile tool that can be used in many types of studies to answer questions at multiple levels of the food stream, from the national food supply to foods available in community settings, to individual food intakes. NCI scientists conducted a study using the HEI-2010 to examine the healthfulness of the U.S. food supply from 1970 to 2010. It showed that the food supply does not provide the right mix of foods to give all Americans a balanced and healthy diet. The results will be published later this year.

FHI 360 helped illustrate the study's findings using multiple formats to shed light on the problem, suggest solutions, and encourage dialogue. As shown in the infographics above—one of the products developed—the U.S. food supply provides too little fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products. It also provides too many calories and unhealthy fats and too much sodium, added sugars, and alcohol.

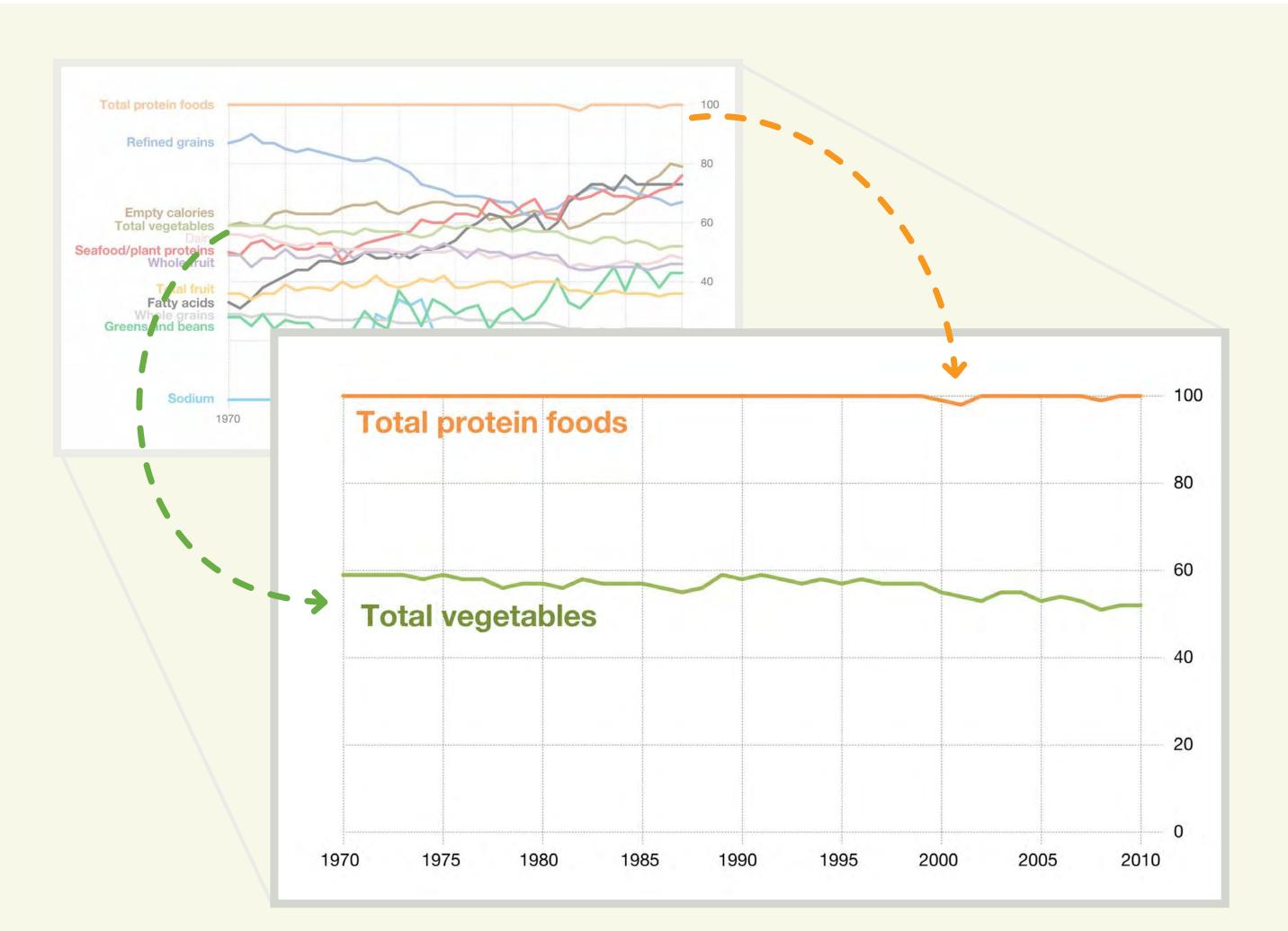
The communication products created offer limitless dissemination possibilities and allow researchers and others to complement current and future research, enhance presentations, build influence in social media platforms, and engage decision makers poised to make change. The first phase of the project was launched April 2013 and included:

- An HEI webpage (http://nccor.org/projects/hei), which serves as a platform for the materials
- An animated video that distills research findings in an engaging, shareable format
- A fact sheet that explains the HEI-2010 scoring metric in detail
- A series of infographics that complement the video

EVALUATION METHODS AND EARLY RESULTS

FHI 360 has developed a detailed promotion and dissemination plan for its HEI-2010 project and materials. Upon the study's publication, it will promote the communication products using the NCCOR blog, e-newsletter, Twitter and YouTube, and will disseminate the package to food policy and obesity organizations, nutrition and food bloggers, infographic hubs, and national media outlets throughout the year.

It will use Google analytics and other social media evaluation tools to track HEI-2010 webpage hits from new visitors, and video downloads. Through webpage unique visits, "retweets" and "mentions" on Twitter, fact sheet PDF and infographic PDF downloads, and video embeds, we will track NCCOR's HEI-2010 product reach and learn how others share and use the information.



Scientists used the HEI-2010 to grade the food supply as it was in 1970 and went to 2010. In 1970, the recommended level for Total Protein Foods was met, but Total Vegetables were only supplied at roughly half the recommended level. Forty years later, the calculations were similar. These images are from the HEI-2010 video. We anticipate that NCCOR funders will report an increased interest in the HEI-2010 tool and its applications among obesity researchers and others.

Even before the formal launch of the promotion effort, NCCOR members have used FHI 360's HEI-2010 work to complement related research and inform and educate internal audiences. The video has been shown in the Summer Curriculum of the Cancer Prevention Fellowship Program, which includes international fellows. It has also been shown to NCI's Diet, Weight, and Physical Activity Group. In addition, the video was picked up by the SaludToday Blog, published by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio.

CONCLUSIONS

The Healthy Eating Index-2010 (HEI-2010) suite of communication products shows how digital and social media can be used to complement and enhance research efforts. As researchers continue using the tool, innovative communication approaches can move the needle, educating audiences and encouraging dialogue.

IMPLICATION FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Translation and dissemination of research findings are critical for driving change around a host of health prevention topics. Video, infographics, and social media are powerful tools that can help ensure scientific findings are accessible and useful to researchers, opinion leaders, and decision makers, thus facilitating action to improve the health of our children.

For more information about the HEI-2010, visit:

- NCCOR: http://nccor.org/projects/hei/index.php
- NCI: http://riskfactor.cancer.gov/tools/hei/
- USDA: http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/healthyeatingindex.htm





