

MEDIA ADVISORY

USDA Satellite Features Feed

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FEATURE – FEDS ENCOURAGE HEALTH AND FITNESS

INTRO: The Federal government is encouraging its workers to eat healthier and get more exercise. And it hopes all Americans pick up on that advice. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:43)

ON A RAINY DAY ON THE NATIONAL MALL, FEDERAL OFFICIALS KICKED OFF THE FEDS GET FIT CAMPAIGN. THE GOAL IS TO GET U-S GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF THEMSELVES FROM BETTER DIET AND EXERCISE TO QUITTING SMOKING.

Kathleen Merrigan, Agriculture Deputy Secretary: More than two thirds of Americans are overweight or obese. Two out of three Americans have a weight problem. And only about one-third engage in regular physical exercise.

So we've got a lot of work to do in the physical fitness front and a lot of our work needs to be focused on our children to make them healthier to make them more productive and to make sure that we beat back this obesity crisis that seems to be overtaking our country.

MERRIGAN TOUTED U-S-D-A'S DIETARY GUIDELINES AS CONERSTONES FOR NUTRITION POLICY AND EDUCATION AND FITNESS.

Merrigan: These guidelines are the basis for the extremely popular my pyramid food guidance system. With my pyramid USDA gives consumers the tools to personalize their approach to healthier food choices based on the growing science behind diet and lifestyle.

AS PART OF FEDS GET FIT, CURRENT AND FORMER PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS WILL PROVIDE EXERCISE CHALLENGES FOR REGULAR FOLKS TO MATCH.

Merrigan: Why the association with the NFL? Because they're leaders in fitness. They capture the American imagination and they're leaders in the community who can motivate.

Darryl Halley, Former NFL player: There has to be a point where we are willing to be accountable for ourselves. With our own hypertension, diabetes, cholesterol. We can't keep looking to our employers or the government to say "hey look they are going to fix it". At some point we've got to look at our own nutrition, our own diet, look at our own lifestyles and say, "Hey, I'm going to be accountable for myself and my health and well-being."

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO FEDS GET FIT DOT GOV. IN WASHINGTON, FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.