



Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (Competent, Proficient, and Expert) in Sustainable, Resilient, and Healthy Food and Water Systems

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is the ability of a system to be maintained over the long term. Resilience is the ability of a system to withstand disturbances and continue to function in a sustainable manner. Issues of sustainability and resilience apply to all aspects of nutrition and dietetics practice, can be practiced at both the program and systems level, and are broader than any one specific practice setting or individual intervention. Given an increasing need to apply principles of sustainability and resilience to nutrition and dietetics practice, as well as growing interest among the public and by Registered Dietitian Nutritionists of health issues related to food and water systems, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group, with guidance from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Quality Management Committee, has developed the Standards of Professional Performance as a tool for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists working in sustainable, resilient, and healthy food and water systems to assess their current skill levels and to identify areas for further professional development in this emerging practice area. This Standards of Professional Performance document covers six standards of professional performance: quality in practice, competence and accountability, provision of services, application of research, communication and application of knowledge, and utilization and management of resources. Within each standard, specific indicators provide measurable action statements that illustrate how sustainable, resilient, and healthy food and water systems principles can be applied to practice. The indicators describe three skill levels (competent, proficient, and expert) for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists working in sustainable, resilient, and healthy food and water systems.

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BY 2050, THE WORLD POPULATION is projected to exceed 9 billion, further stressing the capacity of global natural resources needed to supply the increasing demand for safe and healthy food and water. Given finite resources, meeting the increased needs must do so with limited opportunities to expand agricultural land and without further depleting essential inputs such as soil, water, or fossil fuels.¹ This challenge, coupled with the mounting need to provide a safe, healthy, and equitable diet for all people, has put a “sustainable food system” at the forefront of institutional and governmental policies

and as a mission for many professional organizations involved with public health and the food system.²⁻⁴

As the nation's largest group of food and nutrition professionals, registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) play a unique and pivotal role in promoting

sustainable, resilient, and healthy (SRH) food and water systems. RDNs in all areas of dietetics are increasingly being called upon to address issues of sustainability and resilience in their daily practice.⁵ In addition, some RDNs are now choosing to focus their practice specifically on ensuring access to and availability of SRH food and water

*Approved October 2013 by the Quality Management Committee of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) and the Executive Committee of the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group of the Academy. **Scheduled review date: October 2018.** Questions regarding the Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists in Sustainable, Resilient, and Healthy Food and Water Systems may be addressed to Academy Quality Management staff, Sharon McCauley, MS, MBA, RDN, LDN, FADA, FAND, director, Quality Management, at quality@eatright.org*

All registered dietitians are nutritionists, but not all nutritionists are registered dietitians. The Academy's Board of Directors and Commission on Dietetic Registration have determined that those who hold the credential Registered Dietitian (RD) may optionally use “Registered Dietitian Nutritionist” (RDN) instead. The two credentials have identical meanings. In this document, the expert working group has chosen to use the term RDN to refer to both registered dietitians and registered dietitian nutritionists.

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systems in their communities in order to improve the nutritional status and food and water security for all individuals. However, training in sustainability and resilience has only recently been incorporated into dietetics education programs.⁶ Therefore, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy), under the guidance of the Academy Quality Management Committee, has developed Standards of Professional Performance (SOPP) for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) in Sustainable, Resilient, and Healthy (SRH) Food and Water Systems to assist RDNs evaluate their current knowledge and identify areas for further education and experience.

Sustainability is often defined as the ability of a system to be maintained over the long term and meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability to meet the needs of future generations.⁷ RDNs must acknowledge that sustainability is always an emerging concept, and that, to be sustainable, one must have the ability to anticipate and successfully adapt to the changes ahead.⁸ Applying sustainability to food and water systems results in a multidimensional and adaptable approach to ensuring that food and water systems meet the needs of individuals and communities and have the capacity to adjust over time to meet the food and water needs of future generations.

As with sustainability, the term *resilience* can take on a variety of definitions, depending on its application. When resilience is applied to food and water systems, it is a measure of the systems' ability to survive and persist within variable or volatile environments.⁹ Therefore, resilient food and water systems have the capacity to absorb various disturbances so that all parts of the system keep functioning as they were or in an improved capacity.¹⁰ Issues of sustainability and resilience of food and water systems apply to all areas of nutrition and dietetics practice, can be incorporated at both the program and systems levels, and are broader than any one specific practice setting or individual intervention. RDNs, therefore, have the opportunity, and indeed the responsibility, to integrate SRH food and water systems principles into their respective practice areas as a means to remain relevant

and to secure, preserve, and strengthen food and water systems, now and for the future.

SRH food and water systems assure that all individuals have equitable and optimal access to food and water, both now and in the future (Figure 1). The foundation of these systems include the following principles:

- **Nutrition and health.** Assures dietary diversity through safe and secure food and water supplies.
- **Social, cultural, and ethical capital.** Promotes cultural diversity while empowering social responsibility and community engagement; advances ethical, humane, and fair treatment of individuals and animals.
- **Environmental stewardship.** Conserves, protects, and renews natural resources (soil, water, air, energy, biodiversity); supports vibrant ecosystems; promotes a low-carbon footprint and mitigates climate change.
- **Economic vitality.** Builds community wealth and is economically viable.

SRH food and water systems—related nutrition and dietetics practice includes policy, system, and environmental change strategies¹¹ that address the quality, quantity, safety, and accessibility of food and water and the impact on human, environmental, economic, and social health.

RDNs recognize that promoting human health requires consideration of complex inter-relationships among multiple factors, including the sustainability, resilience, and health of food and water systems. Given the multifactorial connections to food and water, RDNs who incorporate resilience and sustainability principles into practice often consider a systems approach. Instead of viewing problems as discrete events with a single solution (reductive thinking), an individual applying a systems approach would address the problem as a component within a larger context, and with the understanding that factors within levels of the system influence each other. A problem can be resolved in the short term by addressing an immediate concern, or it can be completely solved by addressing a larger underlying cause. It is important to understand

the limitations of a reductionist approach and the benefits of a systems approach to promoting optimal public health.

An RDN working as part of a trans-disciplinary team applying a systems approach to improving the food and water systems would consider all of the multiple implications (eg, externalities) of any one approach to resolving a problem, as well as the potential alternative approaches, before implementing a change in policy or the environment. For example, when working on Food Policy Councils to increase access to healthy foods, RDNs would consider the impacts of food deserts, Electronic Benefit Transfer availability at farmers' markets, community gardens, city planning regulations, and economic effects.

OVERVIEW OF ACADEMY QUALITY PRACTICE RESOURCES

This document aligns with and expands upon the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Revised 2012 SOPP for RDNs.¹² The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Commission on Dietetic Registration's Code of Ethics,¹³ along with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Revised 2012 Standards of Practice (SOP) in Nutrition Care and SOPP for RDs,¹² are tools within the Scope of Practice in Nutrition and Dietetics¹⁴ and Scope of Practice for the RD,¹⁵ which guide the practice and performance of RDNs in all settings.

The scope of practice in nutrition and dietetics is composed of statutory and individual components, including the Code of Ethics, and encompasses the range of roles, activities, and regulations within which RDNs perform. For credentialed practitioners, scope of practice is typically established within the practice act and interpreted and controlled by the agency or board that regulates the practice of the profession in a given state.¹⁴ An RDN's statutory scope of practice may delineate the services an RDN is authorized to perform in a state where a practice act or certification exists.

The RDN's individual scope of practice is determined by education, training, credentialing, and demonstrated and documented competence to practice. Individual scope of practice in nutrition and dietetics has flexible

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