Opportunities with US Public Health Service

To the Editor:

We were pleased to read the article in the December 2008 issue (1) describing the service registered dietitians (RDs) provide to the military family. However, it is important to also mention that the military is not the only opportunity for RDs to serve their country in uniform. The US Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps is one of seven uniformed services of the United States (ie, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). The PHS Commissioned Corps currently has 97 active duty RDs working alongside our civil service colleagues throughout the US Department of Health and Human Services. The PHS Commissioned Corps is led by the US Surgeon General and has the mission to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation.

The PHS Commissioned Corps offers many of the same pay, medical and health benefits, educational benefits, and retirement package as the military. In fact, many PHS RDs have also served in a branch of the military. The two significant differences between serving on active duty in the PHS vs the military are:

1. In the PHS, the mission is *public health* not defense.
2. In the PHS Commissioned Corps, you are not periodically directed to change duty locations, although you are encouraged to take different assignments over your career. You actively apply for each new job; so, you have a choice in where you live and what type of work you do.

PHS RDs have similar responsibilities as our military colleagues as well as our civilian counterparts. Our work is focused on creating and maintaining healthful lifestyles for all US citizens. Some PHS RDs work in the clinical setting; however, many RDs work outside the traditional health care setting. For example, PHS RDs:

- ensure the safety of our nation's food products through research, testing, and inspection of food production facilities through our work in the Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture;
- conduct research to improve the health and nutritional status of people throughout the country and the world through our work at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- coordinate nutrition programs and establish standards for nutrition service, through our work in the Indian Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Prisons, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services;
- develop national health and nutrition programs and national dietary guidelines; and
- respond to public health emergencies and assist on international humanitarian missions in collaboration with the US Navy.

Individuals who have a current, unrestricted, and valid registration by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (or those in training), and are interested in serving our country in uniform, should consider the US PHS Commissioned Corps.

For more information on the US PHS Commissioned Corps, please visit www.usphs.gov or call 1-800-279-1605.

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Reference

1. Mathieu J. RDs in the military. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2008;108:1984-1987.

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Organic vs Conventional Farming

To the Editor:

We are submitting this letter in response to the brief news article titled, "Manic for Organic? Think Again: Organic Farming Not Always Best," published in the November 2008 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* (1).

The piece highlights the results of a recent study conducted in Italy comparing the nutrient content and heavy metal levels in tomatoes grown using conventional, integrated pest management or organic farming systems. The team (2) reported higher levels of salicylate and protein in the organic tomatoes, but lower levels of vitamin C and lycopene compared to the integrated pest management and conventional fruit (2).

Rossi and colleagues (2) acknowledge that their vitamin C findings contradict several other studies comparing organic vs conventional samples. They also comment that reported differences in lycopene between organic and conventional tomatoes/tomato products have been mixed (2). However, most comparison studies report that organic crops contain more vitamin C and phenolic compounds and less protein (3,4). The likely explanation for the contradictory vitamin C and protein findings in the Italian study (2) is, actually, noted by the authors. They applied 30 tons of unspecified animal manure per hectare on the organic plot, resulting in a reported 25% higher rate of nitrogen than in the conventional plot (2).

Typically, conventional farmers apply more nitrogen per acre than organic farmers. Plus, the nitrogen in conventional fertilizers is present in more readily available forms. The bonanza of nutrition on conventional farms triggers rapid plant growth and high fruit yields, but also dilutes several key nutrients.

Numerous studies have confirmed an inverse relationship between nitrogen levels and nutrient content as a result of the "dilution effect" (for a recent review, see "Still No Free Lunch" by Brian Halweil) (5). The