Suspect that I sometimes come across as the voice of doom when I highlight the problems in our food supply, be it the prevalence of foodborne illnesses, industry’s relentless lobbying to prevent policy reforms, or the dangers of high-sodium diets. For a change, I’d like to replace Gloomy Gus with Cheerful Charlie and point out some of the progress our country has made. (In each case, Gus does manage to put in an appearance, though.)

■ Soda. After half a century of increasing consumption, it’s heartening to see a 24 percent decline since 1998. That puts us back to where we were in about 1980. Regular Pepsi is down 39 percent since 1998, and Coke is down 23 percent.

Another victory: Regular soda has largely disappeared from schools. Full-calorie soft drinks in high schools, for example, plummeted from 12½ ounces per student per week in 2004 to just half an ounce in 2009. The drop in soft drink consumption has paralleled by an unprecedented 14 percent decrease in sugar consumption (including high-fructose corn syrup).

But we still live in a world where sugary (and fatty) foods tempt us 24/7.

■ Obesity. Rates soared to record levels in the 1990s, but have begun leveling off in both children and adults. That may be due in part to fewer sugary drinks.

But with two out of three adults and one out of three children overweight or obese, excess weight remains a huge threat.

■ Trans fat. Trans fat in foods has declined by about two-thirds since 2000, thanks to trans’ appearance on Nutrition Facts labels, local and state laws banning partially hydrogenated oil (the major source of artificial trans fat) from restaurants, and lawsuits against fast food companies and restaurants. The change is probably preventing thousands of fatal heart attacks every year. But progress has stalled (and probably won’t resume until the FDA bans partially hydrogenated oil).

■ Salt. Companies from Bumble Bee to Walmart have cut the sodium in some of their foods. But they have to lower sodium much more to prevent the high blood pressure—and heart attacks and strokes—that their products cause.

■ Heart disease. The decline in artificial trans fat, the use of drugs to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and fewer people smoking help explain why heart attack death rates fell by 28 percent from 1997 to 2007.

But the doubling or more of obesity rates since 1980 will surely slow—or even reverse—that progress.

The bottom line: Americans have made exciting progress in achieving better health. Now it’s time to start doing something about those “buts.”