



**Friends of the Earth's Oral Testimony on the
Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee**

Delivered by Kari Hamerschlag, Senior Program Manager, Food and Technology Program,
at the Public Meeting for Oral Testimony on the Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines
Advisory Committee, March 24, 2015

On behalf of Friends of the Earth, a non-profit organization that fights for a healthier, more just and sustainable world, we commend the Advisory Committee for its visionary leadership in guiding our nation's food policy in a direction that will ensure a healthy, nutritious and adequate food supply for current and future generations.

We join with more than 100 prominent organizations and individuals supporting sustainability in the 2015 Dietary Guidelines in a full-page ad featured today in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Politico*.

We also bring the voices of more than 120,000 signatories to a petition supporting the Expert Panel's call for a diet with more plant-based foods and fewer animal products for the sake of public health and the environment.

The petition is being promoted by a coalition of more than a dozen organizations representing millions of members, including Friends of the Earth, Center for Biological Diversity, John's Hopkins Center for Livable Future, Healthy Food Action, Center for Food Safety, Food Democracy Now, Green America, Organic Consumers Association, Pesticide Action Network, Roots of Change, Rain Forest Action Network, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Food Tank and Slow Food USA.

Sustainability and the health of the nation are deeply intertwined.

As the report states: "Linking health, dietary guidance, and the environment will promote human health and ensure current and long-term food security"

This is not a theoretical issue. An unprecedented drought is gripping the nation's critical food producing areas and much of our precious—and rapidly declining—water supply is going to crops that are fed to animals.

In California, a quarter of all irrigation water is going to support crops for animal feed—and an even larger portion of scarce irrigation water in the Midwest is going to thirsty animal feed crops like corn.

Studies show that reducing consumption of animal proteins is key to conserving water and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. For example, it takes six times as much water to produce a gram of beef protein as it does to produce a gram of lentil protein,¹ and beef emits 30 times more greenhouse gas emissions than these healthy legumes.²

Given the large quantities of water, pesticides, fuel and fertilizer that go into meat and dairy production, shifting towards plant-based diets must play a key role in our efforts to feed more people with fewer resources while curbing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing air and water pollution.

The science is clear that a more plant-centered, less resource-intensive diet is also better for our health.



Americans consume significantly more meat than is recommended by USDA guidelines and far more than the rest of the world.³ This high consumption of industrially produced meat, especially red and processed meat, is associated with increased risks of diet-related disease ([heart disease](#),⁴ [diabetes](#)⁵ and [cancer](#)⁶), and ingestion of harmful pesticides and cancer-causing [dioxin](#).⁷

Reducing Americans' meat consumption would save hundreds of billions of dollars in avoided health care costs from these diet-related diseases that are associated with high meat consumption, especially red and processed meat.

Plant-based diets, in contrast, are associated with lower weight, lower blood pressure, longer life spans and reduced risk of diabetes.⁸

How food is produced also has a big impact on public health and the environment. As the Scientific Report pointed out: "Meeting current and future food needs will depend on ... developing agricultural ... practices that reduce environmental impacts and conserve resources, while still meeting food and nutrition needs."

Current production practices, especially industrial meat production, generates substantial greenhouse gas emissions, degrades soil, destroys biodiversity and pollinator habitat and produces significant air, land and water pollution.

As your agencies define the 2015 Dietary Guidelines, it's important to keep in mind that more sustainable, humane and organic food production methods that do not rely on the routine use of antibiotics, hormones, chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides are better for public health, workers and the environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the views of our organization.

¹ Mekonnen MM, Hoekstra AY. (2010). [The green, blue, and grey water footprint of Farm Animals and Animal Products](#), Volume 1, Main Report, UNESCO-IHE, Institute for Water Education

² Hamerschlag, K. (2011). [Meat Eater's Guide to Climate Change and Health](#). *Environmental Working Group*.

³ Speedy, AW. (2003). [Global Production and Consumption of Animal Source Foods](#). *Journal of Nutrition*

⁴ Pan A1, Sun Q, Bernstein AM, Schulze MB, Manson JE, Stampfer MJ, Willett WC, Hu FB. (2012) [Red Meat Consumption and Mortality: Results from 2 Perspective Cohort Studies](#)
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22412075>

⁵ Pan A., Sun Q., Bernstein A. M., Schulze M. B., Manson J. E., Willett W. C., et al. (2011). [Red meat consumption and risk of type 2 diabetes: 3 cohorts of US adults and an updated meta-analysis](#). *Am. J. Clin. Nutr.*

⁶ Cross AJ, Leitzmann MF, Gail MH, Hollenbeck AR, Schatzkin A, et al. (2007) [A Prospective Study of Red and Processed Meat Intake in Relation to Cancer Risk](#). *PLoS Med.*

⁷ [Food and Drug Administration, A Veterinarian Newsletter July/August 2000 Volume XV, No IV](#)

⁸ Orlich MJ, Fraser GE. (2014). [Vegetarian diets in the Adventist Health Study 2: a review of initial published findings](#). *Am J Clin Nutr.*