



Reflections on the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines Process and Recommendations on Developing Future Editions of *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

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Good morning. My name is Rebecca Klein. I'm here on behalf of Friends of the Earth, a non-profit organization with over 650,000 supporters that fights for a healthier, more just and sustainable world. Thank you, Ms. Tagtow and USDA for the opportunity to offer our perspective today.

To start, we want to highlight what has been working well. We believe that the overall process for gathering and synthesizing scientific evidence to inform the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines was nearly flawless. The methods used by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee to review the scientific evidence were rigorous and fully appropriate to the task at hand.

We commend USDA and HHS for encouraging a transparent process of scientific inquiry, including at least six publicly televised committee hearings.

We therefore urge only a few changes with regard to the role of the Advisory Committee and its transparent process for reviewing, evaluating and deliberating on the latest scientific findings.

What does need to change, however, is interference by Congress and the food industry that prevented USDA and HHS from publishing dietary guidance that fully and clearly reflected the science and the unanimous recommendations of the Advisory Committee, particularly in regard to the need for Americans to consume less meat and more plant-based foods for their health and America's long-term food security.

More transparency is needed for the public to understand why key consensus recommendations from a highly esteemed scientific body were ignored in the final Dietary Guidelines, particularly when key science-based recommendations were supported by more than 21,000 public comments, 200,000 public petitions, 700 health professionals and hundreds of mayors.

While such public opinion should not drive the contents of the Dietary Guidelines, it should have bolstered USDA and HHS's resolve to publish dietary guidance that fully aligned with the evidenced-based conclusions of the Advisory Committee. Unfortunately, the only conclusion that one can draw from this failure to incorporate the overwhelming science on the health benefits of meat reduction is that Congress and profit-driven food industry interests interfered in a way that prevented the final guidelines from fully reflecting the weight of the scientific evidence.

Experts from leading public health organizations, including the World Health Organization, the American Heart Association and American Cancer Society and hundreds of scientific studies confirm that people need to eat less meat, particularly red and processed meat, for better health. Yet, the

only recommendation to reduce meat consumption was buried deep in the final report and only applied to teenage boys and men, with no overall or specific recommendation on eating less red and processed meat.

For the sake of Americans' health and our country's future ability to produce nutritious food, aspects of this process must change and we offer the following recommendations.

The 2015 Advisory Committee was comprised of experts with integrity and with utmost regard for the scientific process. The future selection process for the Advisory Committee similarly should ensure the appointments of independent academics and experts who have no conflicts of interest, especially in terms of ties to the food industry.

In addition, we would recommend the inclusion of committee members who have expertise in food production sustainability as it relates to long-term nutritional sufficiency, as well as human and environmental health. It is impossible to discuss what Americans should be eating without taking into account the impacts of food production on public health and future food security.

That is why it is especially unfortunate that Secretaries Burwell and Vilsack ignored the weight of the evidence and decided that consideration of sustainability issues was outside the scope of the Dietary Guidelines. Other analyses, particularly the one authored by former USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan and colleagues in the peer-reviewed journal *Science*, clearly show that it is entirely appropriate and even necessary to include dietary guidance on food production methods and their impact on future food security and sufficiency.

In conclusion, what clearly needs to change is congressional and industry interference with the Agencies' ability to produce a document that reflects the careful, objective, evidence-based work of the Advisory Committee and the preponderance of global scientific evidence.

We hope the IOM will confirm the soundness of the current Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee process, and focus much of its review on how to enhance the ability of USDA and HHS to publish Dietary Guidelines that fully and clearly reflect the weight of the scientific evidence, as opposed to political or profit-driven food industry interests.

Thank you for your time, and for the opportunity to share our perspective on this important process.