



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

June 8, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Alex Azar
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Azar:

We write to express concern that, unless reconsidered, the current process for developing the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) will result in no change in guidance that has failed to correct ever-increasing rates of obesity and Type 2 diabetes in a majority of the U.S. population. We ask that you direct the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) to suspend its deadline of June 17 for submission of its draft final report until such time that it can review and report on scientific studies that have been excluded from this process, including on low-carbohydrate diets.

In October 2015, the Committee on Agriculture held a hearing to review the effectiveness of the DGA following the policy's inception in 1980. At that hearing, then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia Burwell Matthews stated that, with regard to preventing the growing incidence of chronic diet-related diseases, "we are on the wrong trajectory." Following the hearing, Congress enacted legislation requiring and funding reports by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) to review the DGA process. The NASEM recommendations, published in 2017, found that, overall, "To develop a trustworthy DGA, the process needs to be redesigned" and that, specifically, the process needed to "improve transparency, promote diversity of expertise and experience, support a deliberative process, promote independence in decision making, and strengthen scientific rigor."¹ There is little evidence that USDA has adopted the majority of these recommendations and therefore the process for developing the 2020 Guidelines remains fundamentally unchanged.

Since the publication of the 2015 DGA, the number of Americans who are overweight, obese, or afflicted by Type 2 diabetes has continued to grow, with over 80 percent of our population now suffering from these conditions.² The advent of COVID-19 has only exacerbated the impact on people with these underlying health problems, with African Americans totaling 27 percent of COVID infections while representing only 13 percent of the population.

¹ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, "Redesigning the Process for Establishing the Dietary Guidelines for Americans," September, 2017, pp. 8, 51. <http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2017/redesigning-the-process-for-establishing-the-dietary-guidelines-for-americans.aspx>

² <https://www.unc.edu/posts/2018/11/28/only-12-percent-of-american-adults-are-metabolically-healthy-carolina-study-finds/>

We understand that the Dietary Guidelines are traditionally presented as guidance for maintaining good health and preventing negative health outcomes. However, by focusing exclusively on prevention, the policy now addresses only a small minority of the U.S. population. Moreover, by excluding low-carb diets because they are associated with weight loss and address existing conditions, the DGAC is withholding from the public a dietary option that has been demonstrated to be extremely helpful for those who are overweight or subject to chronic diseases, including diabetes. The 2020 DGAC appears on track to simply bring forward the existing 2015 Guidelines, which recommend a diet of more than 50 percent of calories from carbohydrates. A low-carb diet is defined as one with 25 percent of calories from carbohydrate or less.

If Americans were free to ignore the Guidelines in setting their dietary goals, we might make progress in reducing rates of diet-related diseases. However, the Guidelines are required guidance for federal feeding programs, including the School Lunch Program, military rations, feeding programs for the elderly, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and they serve as the basis for recommendations by physicians and dietitians, as well as for the Nutrition Facts Panel on food packaging. Thus, their influence is pervasive in determining the foods consumed by Americans.

Mr. Secretaries, after repeated failures of the DGA to prevent, much less reverse, the worsening diet-related health of Americans, it is time for the DGAC to stop digging the hole it's standing in. We urge you to direct the Committee to suspend its June 17 deadline for its preliminary report and reopen consideration of scientific literature that can provide realistic advice for the majority of Americans who suffer from diet-related conditions, including diabetes and obesity. This process should include allowing review of scientific studies on weight loss, studies on subjects with existing diet-related health problems, and all studies on low-carbohydrate diets. It should also include a public hearing on the DGAC's findings and an adequate period for subsequent public comment.

Thank you in advance for considering these views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dusty Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.