

November 7, 2019

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
South Building  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretaries Azar and Perdue:

We are reaching out to ask you to ensure that the next iteration of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) reflect guidance and recommendations supported by the strongest possible scientific evidence.

We need hardly tell you the importance and significance of the DGA given that they form the basis for our country's nutrition education and strongly influence the foods that are provided through public entities like schools, nursing homes, community health centers, hospitals and prisons. The DGA dictates food consumption patterns for millions of Americans, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program education programming (SNAP-ed), the Special Nutritional Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and nutrition programs for the elderly. Accordingly, we must ensure that these federally mandated guidelines reflect recommendations deriving from the most robust scientific evidence base available.

The need for a reliable DGA is particularly timely, as Americans today are as unhealthy as ever: according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 40 percent of Americans have obesity, 60 percent struggle with one or more chronic, non-communicable diseases, and more than 100 million suffer from diabetes or prediabetes. It is thus vitally important that the revised DGA recommendations are as timely and accurate as possible.

We raise this concern in the aftermath of several recent reports in leading peer-reviewed journals that highlight the variable rigor, quality and interpretation of studies of human nutrition generally, and the variable strength of evidence underlying recommendations about red meat consumption in particular. While we do not take a view on meat consumption *per se*, the recent report on this subject in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reminds us that the DGA for 2020-2025 to be issued shortly must reflect the weight of the highest quality evidence available, using the best international standards for systematic reviews of the science. These standards uniformly prioritize controlled trials whenever possible, as these types of studies most reliably assess causation between the studied dietary variable and a particular health outcome. In developing the next iteration of the DGA, we encourage your agencies to follow these standards in your analyses and deliberations.

Given the work that your agencies have begun to undertake to assemble and roll-out the next iteration of the DGA, we urge you to instruct your staff to ensure that this iteration is truly the most up-to-date and useful version yet, grounded in scientifically rigorous evidence, with clear delineation of the strength and quality of the scientific evidence for each recommendation made. This approach will both improve the utility of the guidance provided and allow all Americans to be confident in the quality of that guidance.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent and timely matter.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
American Council on Exercise  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Transitions of Care Coalition  
Obesity Action Coalition  
Postpartum Support International  
RetireSafe  
The Nutrition Coalition  
The Obesity Society

CC: Senator Lamar Alexander, Chair, Senate HELP Committee  
Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee  
Senator Pat Roberts, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee  
Senator Bob Casey, Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee  
Senator John Hoeven, Chair, Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee  
Senator Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee  
Representative Frank Pallone, Chair, House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Representative Greg Walden, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Representative Collin Peterson, Chair, House Agriculture Committee  
Representative Mike Conaway, Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee  
Representative Sanford Bishop, Chair, House Agriculture Appropriations Committee  
Representative Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Member, House Agriculture Appropriations Committee