May 8, 2015

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Secretary Sylvia Matthews Burwell  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Re: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015

Dear Secretaries Vilsack and Burwell:

As leaders in public health, nutrition and related fields, the undersigned organizations write to convey their shared views on the expert report prepared for the eighth edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) and to provide recommendations for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the 2015 DGA policy report.

Overall, we strongly support the health-related conclusions and policy recommendations in the DGAC report and urge you to carry them forward in the policy report. Many of the undersigned organizations will also be submitting more detailed individual comments. As a coalition, we make the following points:

A) We commend the DGAC’s recognition that a variety of healthy dietary patterns can help lower the public’s risk of chronic diseases. Healthy dietary patterns share many of the same characteristics, including higher intakes of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and lower intakes of added sugars, saturated fat, sodium, and red and processed meats.

B) We strongly support the DGAC’s focus on the broad range of factors, including policy and environmental approaches that influence dietary and weight-related behaviors. The DGA policy report should continue to reflect these sensible, evidence-based improvements to our food environment and to emphasize public policies that support and facilitate Americans’ ability to make healthier food and beverage choices across the lifespan.

C) Regarding the following nutrients and food sources:

   a. We support the DGAC’s recommendations to reduce consumption of added sugars, including the need for a line on added sugars on the Nutrition Facts label that includes a percentage Daily Value based on a maximum of 10 percent of calories or less for a 2,000-calorie diet, and for
amounts expressed on the label in teaspoons as well as grams to ease consumer understanding.

b. The DGA should continue to strongly recommend reducing daily sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams per day for the general population, and believe further reductions are appropriate recommendations for at-risk populations.

c. We support the DGAC Scientific Report’s conclusion that the Guidelines include a recommendation to lower intake of red and processed meats to reduce the risk of cancer and other adverse health outcomes.

d. The DGA should continue to advise Americans to limit their intake of foods rich in saturated fat and replace saturated fats with monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats, rather than refined carbohydrates.

e. We concur with the DGAC report that additional measures are needed to encourage and support consumption of more fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. We support the simple, actionable message to consumers to make fruits and vegetables half their plate at meals.

f. We support the Report’s emphasis on whole grains as part of a healthful diet and encourage you to provide clear recommendations to help consumers translate this advice into healthier consumption patterns and reduce current confusion concerning grain consumption.

D) We support the development of policies both to promote water as the primary beverage of choice and to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

E) We recognize sustainability as an essential component of federal dietary guidance.

A majority of Americans are overweight or obese, which increases their risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and other chronic diseases. The DGA report should emphasize the importance of achieving and maintaining calorie balance or weight loss through the combination of a healthy diet, physical activity, and reducing sedentary behavior.

Despite public reports to the contrary, the basic nutrition advice in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans has been largely unchanged for decades. Yet the food environment continues to foster a diet too low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and too high in foods high in saturated fat, salt, and added sugars. While people need clear, actionable advice, education alone will be insufficient to support healthy dietary patterns in the current food environment. It is essential that the DGA report include recommendations for policies and environmental changes that support and improve public health. We
strongly urge HHS and USDA to include the DGAC’s policy recommendations in the final DGA.

We urge HHS and USDA to continue the good work of the DGAC and publish a robust set of science-based guidelines that will help Americans to avoid the physical and financial burdens of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

Sincerely,

A Well-Fed World
Action for Healthy Food
American Diabetes Association
American Institute for Cancer Research
Bronx Health REACH
California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins University
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Climate 911
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Coalition for Healthy School Food
Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union
Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Farm Animal Rights Movement
Food Democracy Now!
Friends of the Earth
Green America
Institute for Healthy Food
Minneapolis Health Department
National WIC Association
Nemours
Nutrition First
Orange County Food Access Coalition
Organic Consumers Association
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Real Food for Kids
Real Food for Kids - Montgomery
cc:

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