

May 5, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC, 20201

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC, 20250

Dear Secretaries Burwell and Vilsack:

I am writing to endorse the Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, in particular the finding in Part D, Chapter 5, Line 310, which states: "A diet higher in plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and lower in calories and animal-based foods is more health promoting and is associated with lesser environmental impact than is the current U.S. diet."

Berkeley Food Institute (BFI), a partnership between the UC Berkeley schools of Law, Public Policy, Natural Resources, Public Health and Journalism, works to catalyze and support transformative changes in our food system. Key to BFI's mission is making the research of our over 105 affiliated faculty available as a resource to policymakers and the general public. We do not represent the official position of the University of California.

As the Scientific Report states, diet-related diseases pose a significant risk to the U.S. population, "but are more pronounced in low-income populations, creating critical health disparities that must be addressed" (Part B, Chapter 1, Line 41). Correcting these health disparities and ensuring affordable access to good food for all Americans are priorities of our research and education efforts. UC Berkeley research now ongoing is providing valuable insights on this problem.

Providing clear and helpful Dietary Guidelines supports families of all types to make the best food decisions, every day. As the Executive Summary states (Lines 147-8), the overall body of evidence clearly identifies the importance of reducing consumption of "red and processed meat, as well as sugar-sweetened foods and drinks and refined grains." Establishing clear and direct guidelines such as these will serve the public good and increase the accessibility of the Guidelines.

We applaud the Committee for considering environmental sustainability in its dietary guidance. As we continue to study the ways in which various aspects of our food system are interconnected, it becomes increasingly clear that dietary advice must consider the ability of our environment to support population food consumption in accordance with the recommendations.

We are also dedicated to a key strategy named in the Report: “Developing agricultural and production practices that reduce environmental impacts and conserve resources, while still meeting food and nutrition needs” (Part D, Chapter 5, Lines 44-45). There are multiple co-benefits from reducing carbon emissions, implementing practices to conserve soil, water and air, and eating diets similar to the one described above.

The Dietary Guidelines shape the implementation of local, state and federal nutrition programs, affecting million of Americans. Cognizant of this fiscal responsibility, as well as our responsibility to our natural environment and the health of future generations, we strongly support the findings of the Advisory Committee and look forward to their adoption.

Sincerely,

Nina F. Ichikawa
Policy Director
Berkeley Food Institute