

February 20, 2020

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

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretaries Perdue and Azar,

We are a group of established U.S. and international nutrition scientists, including three former members of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, who have just concluded a two-day workshop entitled “Expert Workshop on Saturated Fats and Health,” in Washington D.C., on Feb 10-11. In this workshop, we examined the health effects of saturated fats, and based on our findings, we respectfully request that the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) give serious and immediate consideration to lifting the limits placed on saturated fat intake for the upcoming 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). This request is based on a review of the most rigorous scientific data available.

Like you, we have a deep commitment to ensuring that population-wide nutrition recommendations are based on rigorous science. Concurrently, we share the concern that making recommendations based on anything but the most rigorous science available is likely to have unintended or even potentially harmful consequences to health.

During the course of the workshop, we discussed the latest scientific understanding of saturated fatty acids and their potential connection to heart disease and stroke. Broadly speaking, we concluded that the best and most updated science fails to support current limits on consuming these fats. Our findings and thinking are summarized below.

Since the launch of the DGA in 1980, Americans have been advised to consume a diet “low in saturated fats.” In 2005, the DGA added a specific limit of 10 percent of calories from these fats, and this recommendation has endured since that time. For the 2020 DGA, the USDA-HHS advisory committee has stated that it will update the recommendations for saturated fats, with a report due in mid-2020.

A critically important consideration is the growing recognition by scientists in the field that the effect of saturated fats on health cannot be considered in isolation but instead must be analyzed as part of the larger food matrix (i.e., the composition of specific foods) in which these fats exist. It is now known that the impact of nutrients on health needs to be considered in the context of the overall diet (i.e., the other nutrients and foods people consume), the type and degree of food processing that a food undergoes, and other crucial factors such as a person’s metabolic health and propensity for disease.

On the basis of our in-depth discussions, we concluded the following:

- Numerous recent meta-analyses of both controlled randomized trials and observational studies have found no significant evidence for effects of saturated fat consumption on cardiovascular or

total mortality. Furthermore, there is evidence that saturated-fat intake may be associated with a lower risk of experiencing a stroke.

- Recommendations to lower saturated fat consumption have been based primarily on the evidence that this will lower LDL, the type of cholesterol in the blood that has been linked to heart disease risk. However, it is now known that there is more than one type of LDL, and that in the majority of individuals, reducing dietary saturated fat does **not** lower the type (small dense LDL) that is most strongly associated with heart disease risk. This may help to explain why lowering saturated fat intake in trials has not been found to reduce cardiovascular mortality.
- The health effect of these fats varies significantly depending on the specific type of saturated fatty acid as well as the specific food source in which it is found. Evidence indicates that it is important to consider the food matrix when evaluating the impact of fatty acids on cardiovascular risk. For example, some foods, such as dark chocolate, whole-fat dairy, and unprocessed meat, have a relatively high saturated-fat content but show no association with increased cardiovascular risk.

Thus, we conclude that there is no strong scientific evidence that the current population-wide upper limits on commonly consumed saturated fats in the U.S. will prevent cardiovascular disease or reduce mortality. A continued limit on these fats is therefore not justified.

We seek to communicate this critical information to other scientists and governing bodies so as to enhance the evidence base for upcoming policy recommendations and research. Undoubtedly, Americans deserve a recommendation for dietary saturated fat that is based on the most current and rigorous science available. We trust that the 2020 DGA Advisory Committee will critically review the most up-to-date evidence and modify past positions on saturated fats accordingly.

Sincerely,

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cc:

Senate

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
*Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions*

The Honorable Patty Murray
*Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions*

The Honorable Deb Fischer
*Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee,
Subcommittee on Nutrition*

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.
*Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee,
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The Honorable John Hoeven
*Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations,
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The Honorable Jeff Merkley
*Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Appropriations, Subcommittee on Agriculture*

The Honorable Roy Blunt
*Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations,
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House

The Honorable Collin Peterson

Chair, House Agriculture Committee

The Honorable Marcia Fudge

*Chair, House Agriculture Committee,
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The Honorable Mike Burgess

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