Dear Honorable President Biden, Vice President Harris, Members of the Presidential Transition Team, Surgeon General of the U.S., Dr. Vivek Murthy, special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, and Members of the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Advisory Committee:

We, the undersigned group of evidence-based nutrition, medical science, public health, social justice and anti-hunger organizations, are writing to respectfully urge you to implement the most effective and decisive strategy to battle the coronavirus pandemic and also prevent future pandemics. We believe this must include (1) deindustrializing animal production and consumption, (2) employing the best scientific tools for medical research and (3) ensuring the COVID-19 Task Force, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, issues urgent Pandemic Nutrition Guidance in favor of a whole food plant-based approach.

“The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is the greatest threat to prosperity and well-being the U.S. has encountered since the Great Depression”

- Former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers & Harvard University economist David Cutler

The coronavirus pandemic will end up costing Americans more than $16 trillion, according to the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA). About half of this price tag, $8.6 trillion, will be driven by the cost of long-term health implications to those who contract COVID-19 and the estimated cost of those who lose their lives as a result.
We urge the U.S. leadership to deindustrialize animal production and consumption:

“IT just boggles my mind that how when we have so many diseases that emanate out of that unusual human–animal interface that we don’t just shut it down.”

—Anthony S. Fauci, MD, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on the need to shut down live animal markets.

Animal industries are among the most dangerous enablers of zoonotic infectious diseases. In addition to COVID–19, Avian Flu, Swine Flu, SARS, HIV, Ebola, Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease, Non–Pulmonary Tuberculosis and other Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs) are linked to meat production, consumption or to the wildlife trade.

We ask COVID–19 Taskforce Members to:

• Prepare a detailed phase–wise plan to close animal factory farms, ban live animal markets, shut down fur farms and exit the wildlife trade;
• Support Cory Booker’s and Elizabeth Warren’s Factory Farm Bill (S.3221 – Farm System Reform Act of 2019); and
• Support the Petition for Rulemaking to shut down U.S. Live Animal Markets filed with Jerome Adams, MD, MPH, the US. Surgeon General by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

“The failure to close a single live animal market in China led to a pandemic that has closed countless businesses worldwide and led to an enormous death toll and economic havoc.”

—Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, in their Petition to the U.S. Surgeon General, Jerome Adams
The science journal *Nature* reported on November 13, 2020 that health officials in Denmark had released genetic and experimental data on a cluster of SARS-CoV-2 mutations circulating in farmed mink, and in people just days after it was announced these mutations could jeopardize the effectiveness of potential COVID-19 vaccines.

The Center for Contemporary Sciences, our coalition’s Medical Science Partner, strongly urges the Advisory Committee to consider the following when forming their recommendations:

We urge the U.S. leadership to employ the best scientific tools for medical research:

**Virus Mutations** – The COVID-19 mutation found in mink farms is highly concerning. Viruses’ ability to adapt to new environments through rapid genetic mutations makes them difficult to combat since potential vaccine(s) may be less effective against new strains. We cannot have a situation like we currently have for the flu, where we are guessing the strains and the effectiveness of each year’s vaccine is unknown.

**Vaccine Development** – To quickly adapt to new viral strains, researchers must employ the fastest, most effective research and testing methods. Typically, vaccine development has a 94% failure rate, largely due to the focus on animal testing. Governmental funding should prioritize methods like organs on-a-chip that are based on human biology and that offer a way to develop vaccines faster and more reliably.

“COVID-19 is not color blind. In the state of New York, in the first months of the pandemic, Black and Hispanic children were more than twice as likely to lose a parent or caregiver to COVID-19 than those who were White or Asian.”

– *The Economist*, Nov 21st Edition
We seek that the U.S. leadership issues urgent Pandemic Nutrition Guidance:

We ask that the COVID-19 Task Force works in collaboration with U.S. Department of Agriculture in creating these guidelines and have them be consistent with a whole food plant-based approach in order to:

**Strengthen Immune Resilience** of Americans (US Adult Obesity Rate is 42.4%). Obesity is a state of malnutrition and is known to impair the immune function by increasing inflammation in the body.

**Prevent up to 80% of chronic conditions** and save Americans up to 80% of the costs associated with chronic conditions (saving over $250 Billion per year in healthcare costs).

**Reduce the impact of suboptimal diets**, which account for $301 per person in terms of cardio-metabolic disease (CMD)-related costs. This translates to more than $50 billion nationally, 84% of which is due to cost of intensive care (Jardim, et al., 2019).

**A CASE OF “ZIP-LOCKED” DESTINIES: WOMEN AND LOW-INCOME AMERICANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF COLOR**

“Risk for invasive mechanical ventilation in COVID-19 ICU Patients with BM > 35 was more than 7X higher versus those COVID-19 ICU Patients who had normal BMI. Our results indicate a clear connection between obesity prevalence, income inequality, and the racial and ethnic population composition across census tracts in the 500 largest U.S. cities.”

- Brief Cutting Edge Report (Caussy et al 2020), Obesity and Place (Fitzpatrick et al 2018)
Ethnicity:

- Obesity rates are higher among Latinos (47%) and Blacks (46.8%) than among Whites (37.9%).

Gender:

- While men are biologically more vulnerable to COVID-19, the pandemic seems to have gendered effects. UN Women has issued guidance on Rapid Gender Assessment Surveys on the impacts of COVID-19.
- Women are more likely to have obesity than men, 41.1% versus 37.9%. Women are also more likely to have severe obesity, 9.7% versus 5.6%.
- One in three jobs held by women has been designated as essential; of these, the majority are held by Women of Color. Of the 5.8 million people working in healthcare jobs that pay less than $30,000 per year, 83% are women, with 50% being Women of Color.

Geography, Education, Income and Food & Nutrition security:

- 110 million Americans, a majority of whom are Persons of Color, reside in “at-risk” and “distressed” ZIP codes, have lower incomes and limited access to healthy food options and advanced education, says The Economic Innovation Group.
- Adults in rural areas are more likely to have obesity than those in metro areas, 34.2 % versus 28.7%.
- College graduates are less likely to be obese than those with less than a high school education, 22.2% versus 35.5%.
- Adults with higher incomes are less likely to be obese. The obesity rate is 29.7% among those making 400% or more above the federal poverty line; the obesity rate is 42.6% for those at 100 to 199% of the federal poverty line.
Thank you for your consideration of our coalition’s recommendations. We strongly believe they are integral to resolving the COVID-19 pandemic in the near term, preventing a future pandemic, and addressing the shadow pandemics of hunger, chronic illness, and systemic inequities suffered by many communities of color in the United States over the longer term.

In health and with gratitude,
The Jiviniti Coalition
References:

The study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, was co-authored by former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers and Harvard University economist David Cutler. Summers was also a top economic adviser to Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, and is a former president of Harvard.


