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U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Agriculture

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May 14, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretaries Vilsack and Burwell:

We write today regarding your ongoing deliberations related to the recommendations received from your Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) and the more than 29,000 public comments that were received prior to the May 8th deadline.

We believe it is vitally important that The Dietary Guidelines for Americans continue to set the gold standard for independent science-based nutrition research. To do so, the process during which the advisory committee collects, reviews, and reports its findings must be beyond question. Unfortunately, the most recent meetings of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee gave rise to many questions about process as well as findings.

Compared to prior advisory committee reports, 2015 was a seemingly unprecedented expansion of the scope of issues the committee chose to address beyond what has traditionally been associated with dietary recommendations. At a time when consumers are already subjected to conflicting and often contradictory nutrition and health information, staying within scope of the statutory intent by providing the public with science-based, realistic and achievable information is more likely to contribute to improved public health outcomes.

We are aware that many of the comments that were developed by stakeholder groups included scientific studies and other evidence that observers assert had been ignored by the advisory committee. While some studies may garner particular interest, there were countless others that stakeholders submitted that are of value. We expect each and every comment to be considered by your agencies before you commence developing your proposed dietary guidelines.

We believe there should be a joint process to fully review and consider the public comments before publishing new dietary guidelines pursuant to the *National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990*. Now that the comment period has closed, it is imperative that for the sake of transparency, such a process is outlined for Members and the general public.

In describing such a process to review over 29,000 comments, the Committee needs to fully understand the following.

- Will each agency (USDA and HHS) be reviewing each and every comment received?
- How many agency staff have been reassigned to help address the increased workload? Have the proper entities been notified of this reprogramming of staff? How long do you expect this additional staff to be reassigned? What workloads were they taken off of in order to assist with this process?
- Preliminary department plans indicated a desire to complete the necessary public materials, formally known as the “nutrition training report,” prior to the end of the calendar year, though it is not required until an additional 12 months following the release of the guidelines. Have you reconsidered that goal given the overwhelming number of comments that now need to be reviewed? If not, do you intend to incorporate the review of the 29,000+ comments received into this work product, and how do you intend to complete that process?

We look forward to your response by June 10th, and thank you in advance for your cooperation,

Sincerely,



K. Michael Conaway
Chairman



Collin Peterson
Ranking Member