November 12, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of the Agriculture Fairness Alliance (AFA) and its members, I am writing to encourage you to adopt federal farm policies that reflect USDA dietary guidelines, equitably supply all Americans with quality nutrition, encourage climate-smart, and drought-resistant food production, and help farmers improve profitability. Furthermore, AFA would like to invite you to attend a listening tour online meeting on December 13, 2013 at 2 pm eastern time with experts in food production, nutrition, and distribution.

AFA is a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring fairness in American agriculture by advocating for local and sustainable farming practices. AFA supports farm policies that prioritize nutritious food crops so they can reach all Americans. We recommend USDA establish an agency-wide directive to support foods recommended in the American Dietary Guidelines (DGA) for 2020-2025, with special prioritization for foods containing fiber - a critical “dietary component of public health concern.”

Insufficient dietary fiber intake is associated with many serious conditions and leading causes of death: cardiovascular disease, cancer, strokes, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, and high blood pressure. Ninety-five percent of Americans are deficient in fiber intake. On average, adults consume only half the dietary fiber they need.

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1 DGA 2020-2025 (dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials/food-sources-select-nutrients)  
2 Things you Need to Know about Fiber (sites.tufts.edu/nutrition/winter-2019/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-fiber)
Studies show that small increases in dietary fiber can lower mortality rates, reverse type 2 diabetes, and lower risk of heart disease. Given that dietary fiber is exclusively found in plant foods like legumes, grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds, Americans should follow DGA guidance that fruits and vegetables comprise half of our meals, with adults consuming 28 to 34 grams of dietary fiber daily.

However, there is not enough dietary fiber production to meet DGA recommendations. The Food and Nutrition Service reports that before accounting for wastage and spoilage, the U.S. food system is delivering 13% fewer grams of dietary fiber than are needed per capita. With an estimated food wastage at 30-40%, the U.S. food system delivers about half of the dietary fiber necessary for the population. While poor dietary choices may be a factor, even if all Americans want to eat recommended amounts of fiber-rich foods, they cannot due to inadequate supply.

This nutritional shortage is most pronounced in socially disadvantaged groups. Dietary fiber consumption among non-Hispanic Black adults is estimated to be 21% lower than among the wider U.S. adult population. Likewise, dietary fiber accessibility is inequitable across economic regions; in one California county, “higher-income areas have twice as many locations with fresh fruits and vegetables compared to the lower-income areas.” Getting dietary fiber to all Americans is an important health equity issue.

An analysis of publicly available data of 2020 federal farm spending demonstrates a divergence from nutritional guideline priorities. Less than 3% was spent on fruit and vegetables, and only 5-12% on foods containing fiber.

When USDA spending mirrors its DGA guidelines, all Americans can benefit from increased equitable access to fiber-rich foods. However, there are additional benefits. Locally produced plant foods can increase food system resiliency in a climate-smart way. Whenever global supply chains experience disruption, reliable local production and distribution of plant-based staples can protect communities against those shocks. Furthermore, drought resiliency improves when diversified plant food crops are grown using sustainable methods. Lastly, plant foods are naturally

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3 Association Between Dietary Fiber and Lower Risk of All-Cause Mortality (academic.oup.com/aje/article/181/2/83/2739206)
4 ADA (care.diabetesjournals.org/content/29/8/1777)
6 DGA 2020-2025 pages 26, 101, and 146
7 Dietary Fiber in the U.S. Food Supply (fns.usda.gov/cnpp/dietary-fiber-us-food-supply)
8 Food Loss and Waste (fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste)
9 Income, race/ethnicity influence dietary fiber intake and vegetable consumption (academic.oup.com/aje/article/181/2/83/2739206)
11 2020 USDA Farm Spending (agriculturefairnessalliance.org/news/2020-usda-farm-program-spending)
12 Soil Health (nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health)
climate-smart commodities,\(^{13}\) climate scientists make clear that plant-rich diets significantly decrease atmospheric carbon.\(^{14,15}\)

Existing USDA programs already empower producers and entrepreneurs to deliver plant foods to local markets, so we strongly encourage USDA’s next budget request to increase funding for these programs that encourage locally grown specialty crops. There is a clear demand for more funding. For example, the Congressional Research Service reports that in 2020 the USDA awarded only 10-15% of funding requests submitted to Farmers Market Promotion and Local Food Promotion Programs. Additionally, merely 5% of Office of Urban Agriculture Innovative Production grant applications were approved.\(^{16}\)

Producers interested in diversifying into specialty food crop production provide an important economic opportunity and good-paying jobs in rural America. For example, a University of Iowa study found that soy-corn operations can earn nearly four times the revenue after transitioning to diversified vegetable production.\(^{17}\) AFA urges the USDA to support policies across all farm programs that assist this diversification for existing producers. USDA should support programs to encourage like-minded activities that will dramatically increase producer profitability.

We look forward to working with you and the USDA staff to support policies that advance DGA guidelines and prioritize the production, processing, and distribution of fiber-rich plant foods in an equitable way to all Americans.

Sincerely,
Laura Reese
Executive Director
Agriculture Fairness Alliance

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\(^{13}\) How does the carbon impact of protein rich foods compare? (ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food)
\(^{14}\) Project Drawdown Solution #4: Plant-rich Diets (drawdown.org/solutions/plant-rich-diets)
\(^{15}\) Analysis and valuation of the health and climate change co-benefits of dietary change ( pnas.org/content/113/15/4146 )
\(^{16}\) Local and Urban Food Systems (crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46538)