

McDougall Newsletter



USDA Demonizes Starch, While Promoting Meat, Dairy, and Disease

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the government agency responsible for the health of Americans, has recently enacted two national nutrition policies that limit the consumption of starchy grains and starchy vegetables, two traditional food groups that have provided the bulk of human diets for all of recordable history.

The first policy will radically change the diets of school children. In the January 2011 report *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*, the USDA Committee on Nutrition Standards for National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs recommended a [reduction](#) in starchy vegetables, such as white potatoes and corn, to one cup (total) per school week. Children, however, are encouraged to eat turkey sausages, egg patties, cheese omelets, chicken quesadillas, beef eggrolls, hot dogs, hamburgers, pepperoni pizza, roast beef, deli ham, chocolate milk, and margarine.

The second policy prevents needy families from getting financial assistance to buy potatoes. Currently, the USDA provides vouchers through the *Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program* for fresh fruits and vegetables. However, fresh potatoes are now specifically [excluded](#) from the list of allowable vegetables. In other words, under this second wide-reaching nutritional policy, a WIC recipient can receive butter, cheese, whole milk, and eggs through the program, but not a single white potato.

Both reports indicate that the primary reason for limiting starches, including the most popular of all vegetable foods, the potato, is to encourage people to choose more green, yellow, and orange vegetables. The net effect of both “anti-starch policies”—encouraging more nutrient-dense, low-calorie vegetables to be eaten—will be to harm the lives of women and children by causing them, by necessity, to get more of their daily sustenance from disease-causing animal foods.

Less Starch Means More Meat and Dairy

Green, yellow, and orange vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and green peppers, because of their high nutrient density, are loaded with vitamins, minerals, and other important phytochemicals; but they lack sufficient calories to support life. Focusing on nutrient density reflects a “supplementation mentality” that suggests that our health problems are somehow due to deficiencies (such as those causing scurvy, beriberi, and pellagra) and the answer is to get more nutrients. However, the opposite is actually true; the health problems of Americans are due to excesses—as in too many calories, and too much fat, sodium, cholesterol, protein, and contamination. Focusing on deficiencies will not solve problems of excesses.

To obtain 2000 calories from broccoli, at 135 calories per pound, means that 15 pounds of these “little green trees” must be eaten daily. You don’t have the will or capacity to eat that much. Thus, because of their sheer volume, eating that many green, yellow, and orange vegetables is impractical, if not impossible, for sustaining life. Starches, like the white potato, on the other hand, provide plenty of readily available energy for active living. Fewer than 10 white potatoes would be sufficient to meet the daily caloric needs (2000 calories) of men, women, and children, while also providing an overabundance of proteins, vitamins, and minerals.





The primary reason to eat is for energy (referred to as calories). Long-term, over several months, proteins, vitamins, and minerals are required for life, but cells deprived of fuel die within hours. In natural foods there are three molecular sources of energy: proteins, fats, and carbohydrates. For energy, the body rarely uses proteins. Only under desperate circumstances, for example, during starvation or while someone is following a very low-carbohydrate diet (an Atkins-type diet), does the body resort to using protein for fuel. Fat can supply daily energy needs, especially when insufficient carbohydrates are present in our meals. However, the usual destiny of dietary fat is the storage depots in our hips, thighs, and abdomen. This fat can then be used later during times of food deprivation. The human body preferentially burns carbohydrates to sustain life and provide for our daily activities. In practical terms, for everyday living, obtain-

ing sufficient healthy carbohydrates means eating starches, such as potatoes, corn, and rice. Beef, pork, chicken, and cheese provide only fat and protein, but no carbohydrate.

Therefore, when the USDA restricts starches (practical carbohydrates) from the diets of women and children, then their choices are limited to animal foods (fats) to obtain an adequate daily supply of energy. Whether done consciously or not, the USDA has boosted the sale of beef, poultry, eggs, and cheese to hungry Americans. With more animal foods also comes more obesity and chronic diseases, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis. Consider these two "anti-starch policies" from the USDA as two giant steps backwards for the health of Americans.

The United States Department of Agriculture

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), created in 1862, was originally referred to as "the People's Department" by President Abraham Lincoln. This was a time in history when farmers and their families made up roughly 50 percent of the US population. The role of the USDA was expanded when congress passed the Food and Drugs Act of 1906 after the uproar caused by the publication of Upton Sinclair's muckraking book, *The Jungle*, exposing the filth and brutality of the meatpacking industries during the early-20th Century. The Act was "For preventing the manufacture, sale, or transportation of adulterated or misbranded or poisonous or deleterious foods, drugs, medicines, and liquors, and for regulating traffic therein, and for other purposes."

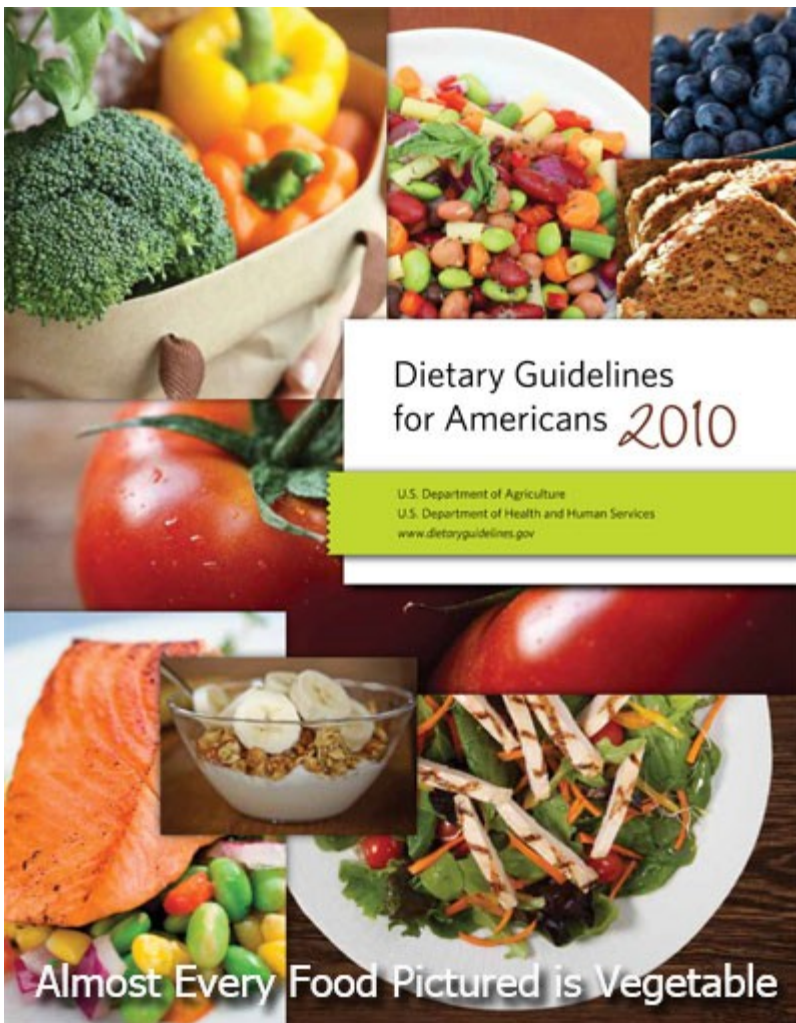
The USDA has the responsibility for overseeing food safety. But, it also has an opposing responsibility to promote agricultural businesses. Nearly 150 years after its creation, tens of thousands of small farms have been bought up and concentrated into a few large politically influential corporations, and the USDA has become the "[Agribusiness Industries](#)' Department," primarily serving the interests of giant food production and distribution corporations.

In [1935](#), the number of farms in the United States peaked at 6.8 million, with a US population of over 127 million citizens. As of [2005](#), with the US population more than doubled, four companies (Tyson, Cargill, Swift & Co., and National Beef Packing Co.) controlled the processing of 84 percent of the country's beef and three of these same four companies (along with an additional fourth) processed 64 percent of the country's pork. Processing of chickens and turkeys is also mostly limited to four companies. As a result of all this concentrated economic power the USDA has ignored scientific evidence in favor of placating the interests of big businesses. These conflicting responsibilities have affected the lives of every American, contributing substantially to our current costly epidemics of obesity and sickness.

A revolving door policy, where the people who work for industry move to roles as legislators and regulators in the government (and vice versa), has played a major role in dietary policies. Members of the USDA have had known associations with the [National Cattlemen's Association](#), [the Meat Packer's Association](#), [the National Pork Board](#), [the National Livestock and Meat Board](#), [the American Egg Board](#), [ConAgra Foods](#), [the National Dairy Council](#), and [Dairy Management Inc.](#)



The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010: A Big Step Forward



In July of 2010 I submitted A [Scientific Critique](#) of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's Report for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. (I sent it to you and the USDA). I wrote that, "Except for a few hopeful sentences, the committee presented a report filled with fear mongering, doubletalk, omissions of major topics, consistently biased views of the scientific literature, and inexcusable factual errors that favored the livestock industries."

Six months later, on January 31, 2011, the USDA published a set of [Dietary Guidelines](#) for Americans more in favor of the people and less industry-friendly than I had ever expected. Americans were told to "emphasize nutrient-dense foods and beverages—vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, and nuts and seeds." In the interest of people (not agribusinesses), they should have stuck with the plant foods: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, and peas.

These 2010 Guidelines clearly emphasize the importance of whole grains, tubers, legumes, green, yellow, and orange vegetables, and fruits with positive discussions about the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and the Mediterranean diet, and about vegetarian (even vegan) diets. Lacking, however, is communication about the importance of getting the bulk of our daily calories from starches: a message crucial for the practical application of a healthy diet. For the most part, starches were mentioned with negative connotations, such as "refined starches," and "to be minimized or excluded along with solid fats, sugars, and sodium."

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The 2010 Guidelines continue to support the meat, poultry, egg and fish industries with recommendations to increase the intake of dairy products, including high-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese; to increase the amount and variety of seafood consumed; and to choose a variety of protein foods (seafood, lean meat and poultry, and eggs). The report was far from candid about communicating the importance of avoiding agribusiness' most profitable foods: meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), a politically active nonprofit organization based in Washington DC, filed a [lawsuit](#) against the USDA on February 15, 2011. In their lawsuit they stated: "The problem is word choice. For healthful foods that people should eat more of, the *Guidelines* are clear. They encourage readers to eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. But when it comes to foods people need to eat less of (e.g., meat and cheese), the *Guidelines* resort to biochemical terms instead of listing specific foods, apparently out of fear of upsetting food producers. That is, the *Guidelines* call for limiting 'cholesterol,' 'saturated fat' 'solid fat.' Similarly, while dairy products account for more than 30 percent of the saturated ("bad") fat in the American diet, the *Guidelines* disguise this fat by splitting dairy products into many categories, including cheese (8.5 percent), butter (2.9 percent), whole milk (3.4 percent), reduced-fat milk (3.9 percent), dairy desserts (5.6 percent), and pizza (5.9 percent), so their contribution to ill health is harder to see." Thus, as PCRM has voiced, more has to be done before the USDA again becomes "the People's Department."

The Pendulum Has Turned

Setting money, politics, and some clarifications needed in the wording aside, the plant-food-strong message of 2010 Dietary Guidelines has eliminated any doubt about what are the major killers of Americans and has established a steadfast direction for restoring health to our nation. This landmark is professionally welcome to me because as I have traveled a straight and narrow path over the past four decades, I have seen "popular opinion" make unexplainable U-turns in directions of nutritional nonsense.

I was an important author at Penguin Books USA Inc. up until the early 1990s. Then there was a renewal of the Atkins Diet. I was approached by my book editor and told that it was time for me to change my writing style: "Dr. McDougall, your high-carbohydrate books recommending that people eat more starchy vegetables are of the eighties. The new diets will focus on meat and other high-protein, low-carb foods. We would like you to make this change in your future books." My response was, "You must be kidding. Essentially all of the respected science to date says that a diet high in animal products will give you heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity. For the past 70 years researchers have clearly shown that a diet of starches, vegetables, and fruits is right for people." "Besides," I told my editor, "do you think I write these books just to make money?"

As history shows, Penguin Books was right about the direction that diet books were headed at that time. However, after six national bestselling books, over one million copies sold, during a 15-year relationship, I have had no new projects with this publisher for more than a decade. But times are changing.

Many other people now see that large-scale progress in the right direction is finally occurring, and they believe stronger than ever in my message about a starch-based diet for people. Confirming my positive attitude about the future, as the pendulum swings back with the beginning of the 21st Century, I now have a contract with one of the world's most influential publishers, Rodale Inc., to produce my new book, *The Starch Solution*, which will be available April of 2012.



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