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Dietary Guidelines 2020

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Joanne Slavin and I am a Professor in Department of Food Science and Nutrition at the University of Minnesota. I am also a dietitian and a farmer. I thank the government, commodity groups, food companies, and non-profits for supporting my diverse research portfolio. I also had the honor of serving on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) so I am well versed on the challenges of dietary guidance (1). Just like a Minnesota hockey game, dietary guidance is a full contact sport.

Despite all the hoopla, I believe the DGA process works amazing well and is admired around the world, especially in countries without access to strong scientists and food science departments. The system that was followed in 2010 by USDA was transparent, data driven, science-based and included stakeholders. The committee members were encouraged to stick to the script and update the scientific findings on diet and disease relationships. Topics of politics, taxation, and public policy were considered outside the scope of the DGAC.

But today's challenges are bigger. The 2020 DGAs will include recommendations from birth to 24 months, not just ages 2 and above. Nutrition is never more important than during infancy, so it is imperative that this be done with scientific rigor and thought. Additionally, the voices of social scientists like Ellyn Satter who support "feeding with love and good sense" will be needed to agree on dietary guidance principles for this critical life cycle group.

I would also support including strong scientists on your committee with expertise in food production, food processing, food economics, food safety, and food security. Many nutrition scientists have narrow expertise that does not work well on a dietary guidelines advisory committee. Backgrounds in Extension, dietetics, and feeding programs are particularly helpful to guide the work of the committee.

In my remaining time, I would like to list the topics of highest need and ask that you ensure that these topics are updated by the advisory committee.

1. Carbohydrates. Obviously, my baby. For sustainability, we need to consume at least 50% of our calories as carbohydrates and we agree that whole grains, pulses, vegetables, and fruits are recommended food groups. Although our health links for these components are based in strong science, the relationship between 10% intake of added sugars and disease outcomes is weak (2). Public health approaches that fixate on a single nutrient can have profound effects – both intended and unintended – across multiple

sectors, including policy, industry, health professionals, and consumers. A single nutrient approach has failed to yield meaningful improvements in health while creating consumer confusion and problematic changes in the food environment.

2. **Proteins.** Proteins were not included in the early Dietary Guidelines as US diets contain adequate amounts of protein. The 2010 DGAC included a review of protein topics and these areas need to be updated and evaluated. A shift to more plant based diets has great benefits for fiber and whole grains, but can cause nutritional problem with protein quality. The dairy group, besides a great source of calcium and Vitamin D, nutrients of concern, also provides 8 grams of high quality protein per serving. Alternative plant based products can supply as little as 1 gram of protein per serving.
3. **Sodium.** Sodium is an essential nutrient and sodium is used in a wide range of food processing applications, including food safety. Strict limits on sodium for all consumers should be evaluated and new studies on the topic included in the body of evidence to drive future sodium policy.
4. **Food processing.** The enrichment of refined grains and fortification with folic acid are important public health measures in the US and the current push for clean label is driving consumers away from foods fortified with vitamins and minerals. Food processing also plays an essential role in food safety and food security as foods that are shelf stable are less likely to be wasted.

In conclusion, public health strategies that focus on overall diet patterns, emphasizing dietary quality and moderation, are much more effective at improving health outcomes. As the DGAs affect all nutrition policy in the United States, recommended dietary patterns must be evaluated for cost, practicality, and access for all. A return to the strong science base behind promoting foods with adequate nutrients rather than avoiding foods to prevent chronic disease will make the 2020 DGAs a model for good nutrition advice for all ages.

References

1. Slavin JL. The challenges of nutrition policymaking. *Nutr J.* (2015) 14:15.
2. Erickson J, Sadeghirad B, Lytvyn L, Slavin J, Johnston B. The scientific basis of guideline recommendations on sugar intake. *Ann Intern Med* 2017.166:257-267.