

New dietary guidelines must be sustainable, regardless of politics

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Credit: Maliz Ong

The new iteration of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) must incorporate sustainability considerations - both for the health and wellbeing of Americans and the world in which we live, urges a new

piece appearing in *Science Express* on Oct. 1.

Co-authored by public health and [sustainability](#) experts at George Washington (GW) and Tufts universities, the article publishes just days before the U.S. House Agriculture Committee will meet with Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia Burwell to discuss the process for developing the DGA. Committee Chairman K. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, believes the sustainability recommendations from an advisory committee to the DGA "greatly exceeded" the group's scope by commenting on "wider policy issues." The authors disagree, saying nothing in the 1990 DGA statute prevents inclusion of sustainability.

"We believe the issue of scope is not the overarching concern, but a political maneuver to excise sustainability from dietary discussions," they write.

Incorporating sustainability in the DGA has become political for a number of reasons, according to the authors:

- Industry leaders feel under attack and believe sustainability evaluations may lead to future regulation.
- Sustainability has the potential to change the current food-group guidance (e.g., fruit, vegetables, protein) to one that focuses on specific foods in food groups (e.g., chicken vs. beef vs. fish).
- New political coalitions may form that further tip the balance in favor of sustainability, particularly when drafting future dietary guidelines.
- Sustainability considerations may sanction and elevate the importance of sustainable diets, opening the government up to greater demands for sustainability investments and telling consumers that such foods are preferred.

If included, the impact of changes to the DGA would be far-reaching: Nutrition professionals rely on its guidance and it informs meal content for the military, 8.6 million Women, Infants and Children program participants and 31 million children served through the National School Lunch Program.

More information: Designing the sustainable plate,
[www.sciencemag.org/lookup/doi/ ... 1126/science.aab2031](http://www.sciencemag.org/lookup/doi/10.1126/science.aab2031)

Provided by George Washington University

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