

Bloomberg School of Public Health

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Michael J. Klag, MD, MPH
Dean

July 27, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Office of the Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Jamie Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As Dean of the Bloomberg School of Public Health, I am writing about the recent controversy about the Meatless Monday Campaign. The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, an academic center based at our School, has provided technical assistance and served as a scientific advisor to the National Meatless Monday Campaign since 2003. The Center (CLF) investigates the interconnections among food systems, public health, diet, and the environment.

I am deeply disappointed with the decision of the United States Department of Agriculture to delete a reference on their website that encouraged USDA employees to consider not eating meat one day a week as a way to reduce their environmental impact. The Center for a Livable Future and I believe that this response to criticism by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association has squandered an opportunity to deepen ongoing discussions about food issues and the public's health in a meaningful way. Our reasons are as follows.

First, Meatless Monday is not "anti-agriculture," as stated in the criticism by the industry. There are many types of producers involved in agriculture, not just meat producers. Among them are dairymen, grain producers, produce farmers, egg producers, as well as those who produce fruits and nuts. The campaign simply states that, just one day a week, consumers should replace one agricultural product with another to improve their health. Such a recommendation is a positive statement intended to benefit all Americans, including the majority of agricultural producers.

Second, increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables in a weekly diet, as suggested by Meatless Monday, conforms to the Dietary Guidelines recently issued by USDA, which are designed to improve public health and reduce the risk of chronic disease. As USDA recommends, people should reduce saturated fat in their diet, eat more lean protein in the form of fish and seafood, and increase their intake of fruits and vegetables.

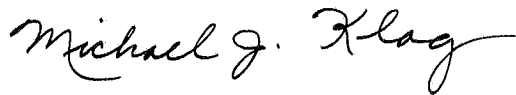


Third, just this week USDA released estimates of the increased cost of meat and dairy products as a result of the drought. USDA estimates that beef prices will increase by as much as 5 percent, dairy products by as much as 4 percent, eggs by as much as 4 percent and pork by 3.5 percent. Eliminating meat one day a week is a practical way for Americans to keep these escalating costs in line with their household budgets.

Leading a large organization with many stakeholders, such as USDA, requires many difficult decisions. In this case, I am concerned that you did not have the opportunity to obtain information about the goals and input of the Meatless Monday program. I would be delighted to meet in person to provide such data.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Klag". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael J. Klag, MD MPH
Dean

cc. President Obama, Sen. Reid, Sen. McConnell, Rep. Boehner, Rep. Pelosi, Robert S. Lawrence, MD.