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White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition & Health  
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TO: White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition & Health

FROM: Produce for Better Health Foundation and Nutrition On Demand

Thank you for the opportunity to share research and recommendations relevant to the planning of the upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition & Health. The Produce For Better Health Foundation (PBH), in partnership with Nutrition On Demand (NOD), recently released a report titled [\*\*FRUIT & VEGETABLE GAP ANALYSIS: Bridging The Disparity Between Federal Spending & America's Consumption Crisis\*\*](#). This summary provides an overview of key findings from this **comprehensive research assessment of fruit and vegetable consumption-focused spending disparities in federal research, feeding and education programs, which are particularly relevant to the strategic roadmap being developed as part of the White House Conference, to help end hunger and nutrition insecurity by 2030.**

Based on an extensive, year-long analysis of federal agency initiatives at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as well as feedback from an open comment period, this report examines how key government departments and agencies currently fund efforts to assist Americans with increasing their consumption of fruits and vegetables – and, importantly, **identifies gaps and opportunities to enhance these initiatives and elevate fruit and vegetable consumption as a national priority.**

Despite the well-established evidence on the role of fruits and vegetables in optimizing health and reducing chronic disease risk, nine out of 10 Americans do not eat enough each day. As evidenced in this report, **Congress is in the position to prioritize appropriations earmarked specifically toward spending on initiatives to close the pervasive and persistent consumption gap.** To improve public health, fruit and vegetable consumption must be elevated as a national priority and commensurately funded. An integrated, multi-sector effort, including increased spending across federal initiatives, is necessary to close the consumption gap, and **the Gap Analysis outlines specific recommendations relevant to the White House Conference pillars as follows:**

**Pillar 1: Improve food access and affordability.**

Elevate intentional and improved fruit and vegetable access for all people, to assist populations at disproportionate risk of chronic disease and nutrition insecurity; opportunities include:

- Supporting an increase in the availability, accessibility, and actionability of fruits and vegetables in all forms (fresh, frozen, canned, dried and 100% juice) in federal feeding programs, such as SNAP, WIC, P-EBT, Summer EBT, and USDA Emergency Food Distribution programs, to improve nutrition security. For example, consider updating the WIC package according to NASEM recommendations to increase benefits for fruits and vegetables, to help families affordably achieve *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) recommendations, and requiring state WIC agencies to consider all forms of fruits and vegetables as part of supported products.

- Improving stacking standards for fruits and vegetables within SNAP and orienting GusNIP to demonstrate the revenue value for self-funding fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP shoppers.
- Simplifying requirements for offering fruit and vegetable incentives to SNAP customers and assuring that online EBT includes a nutrition education and promotion component.
- Elevating fruit and vegetable recommendations and incentives within the Child Nutrition Reauthorization, to inform critical federal nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, WIC and Farm to School Program.
- Expanding CDC efforts to address nutrition insecurity and healthy, sustainable food systems with increased fruit and vegetable access, including coordination with SNAP-Ed and GusNIP.
- Increasing program flexibilities and investments in emergency food assistance, ensuring federal agencies have the authority to grant needed waivers and flexibilities during times of future economic downturns, recessions, and public health emergencies.

**Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices.**

Create and promote inspiring and actionable ideas that create new, sustainable habits, highlighting positive and unifying messages, to support fruit and vegetable consumption in all forms (fresh, frozen, canned, dried and 100% juice), while also reinforcing existing behaviors as well as appreciating and acknowledging individual needs, barriers, and successes; stakeholders must ensure fruits and vegetables are not only purchased, but *consumed* – and use innovative education to address behavioral barriers to doing so. Opportunities include:

- Highlighting research-based fruit and vegetable eating behavior recommendations and practical solutions within SNAP-Ed, DGA, MyPlate and similar federal programs reaching Americans.
- Increasing current funding for Team Nutrition, SNAP-Ed, and MyPlate to ensure fruit and vegetable consumption is not only encouraged, but that realistic solutions are also offered to Americans to effectively educate and engage them in increasing their intake over time.
- Incentivizing best practices for increasing access to, and choice of, fruits and vegetables, based on HHS criteria such as: knowledge of healthy foods and meal preparation; taste preferences, including genetic and cultural; socioeconomic determinants such as low-income and nutrition insecurity; availability of healthy foods at work, school and other group settings; community access to grocery stores, produce gardens, and farmers' markets; marketing and nutritional labels on packaged foods; and quantity and nutritional quality of foods produced and available.
- Demonstrating how all forms of fruits and vegetables count toward filling the consumption gap in nutrition education efforts. Inclusive language regarding all forms (fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100% juice) supports a positive view of all forms of fruits and vegetables.
- Enhancing nutrition education efforts with greater emphasis on more modern, digital vehicles to reach consumers whenever and wherever they are making food decisions, and to offer solutions that help address barriers such as taste and convenience, that Americans have when eating more fruits and vegetables.
- Empowering consumers via education initiatives to share ideas for enjoying fruits and vegetables among family, friends and peers – to create a community of advocates raising awareness that eating more fruits and vegetables can be one of the most important actions taken to improving health and happiness.

## **Pillar 5: Enhance nutrition and food security research.**

Support innovative clinical and consumer research, to support improved fruit and vegetable consumption behaviors; opportunities include:

- Continuing human nutrition research, such as clinical trials supported at CDC and NIH, to better understand the health benefits associated with fruit and vegetable intake, as well as the impact of bioactives and phytochemicals uniquely and readily available in fruits and vegetables.
  - PBH continues to support scientific research to understand the role of fruits and vegetables in promoting health, including the recently published [\*Fruits, vegetables, and health: A comprehensive narrative, umbrella review of the science and recommendations for enhanced public policy to improve intake\*](#) – which was authored by researchers at several academic centers across the country. This research affirmed the current daily recommendations for fruits and vegetables to support optimal health and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease – reinforcing the role of fruit and vegetable consumption as a priority in addressing nutrition insecurity.
- Prioritizing research within USDA and CDC that addresses fruit and vegetable consumption within population segments and among different geographies, to help all sectors support evidence-based, sustainable solutions.
  - PBH has led significant research to understand fruit and vegetable intake trends and behavioral patterns among Americans, to ultimately inform multi-sector solutions that can inspire lasting, improved fruit and vegetable eating habits. For example, PBH released its latest [\*State of the Plate: America's Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Trends\*](#) (2020) report, which highlights the urgent need to close the growing fruit and vegetable consumption gap.
- Expanding human nutrition research funding at CDC and NIH to better understand emerging health and wellbeing benefits associated with fruit and vegetable intake, such as mental wellbeing, happiness, gut health, inflammation and immunity, which could ultimately help inspire more healthful eating behaviors.
- Encouraging collaboration across disciplines including food, nutrition, agricultural and behavioral sciences to determine evidence-based strategies that increase adherence to DGA.

In addition to the above recommendations specific to the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition & Health pillars, our research also illuminated the following disparities and opportunities within federal agencies, which may be of interest in the development of the strategic roadmap to end hunger and diet-related diseases by 2030:

**USDA:** Analysis of appropriate USDA spending indicates a substantial disparity in addressing the significant underconsumption of fruits and vegetables commensurate with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) as demonstrated by the misalignment of commodity food group purchases and the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) market basket cost-share percentages as well as fruit and vegetable research spending levels. Further, only 0.5% of USDA food and nutrition assistance programs' budgets, combined, are allocated toward nutrition education and promotion.

### **Recommendations:**

- The proportion of funding for under-consumed food groups in the DGA and on MyPlate — especially fruits and vegetables — needs to be dramatically increased, given their pervasive underconsumption and unrealized public health benefits, funding appropriated for the DGA must be prioritized.
- Given the far-reaching impact of the DGA as the basis for all U.S. nutrition programming and policies, it's imperative to dedicate ongoing and adequate funds for USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) to support their development and implementation.

**NIH:** NIH research covers a wide range of important topics related to health; fruit and vegetable research accounts for less than 4% of all NIH projects.

**Recommendations:**

- Increased spending on prevention projects is warranted, as is increased spending on fruit and vegetable projects for diet-related diseases, to be consistent with public health goals and needs.
- With fruit and vegetable consumption continuing to decline, and associated detrimental health outcomes on the rise, NIH projects should increasingly elevate fruit and vegetable consumption as a priority recommendation within initiatives to prevent and/or reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cancer as well as obesity and type 2 diabetes.

**CDC:** According to this analysis, Congress dramatically underfunds CDC for its work to promote healthy eating, specifically fruit and vegetable consumption, compared to tobacco prevention. In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, CDC's appropriations for tobacco prevention were almost six times those for promoting fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Recommendations:**

- To bring fruit and vegetable spending more in line with tobacco prevention efforts, CDC's funding should be increased to at least 30% (\$63 million) of tobacco prevention spending (at \$210 million) — almost double the current spending level associated with promoting fruits and vegetables for their public health benefits (\$38 million).

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3), PBH is the only national organization dedicated to helping consumers live happier, healthy lives by eating more fruits and vegetables, including fresh, frozen, canned, dried and 100% juice, every day. Since 1991, PBH has invested in extensive consumer behavioral research, as well as integrated campaigns and partnerships with government, food industry stakeholders, health professionals and other thought leaders to collaborate, facilitate and advocate for increased fruit and vegetable intake, including our latest behavior-based call-to-action, Have A Plant®.

NOD is a Washington, DC-based food and nutrition affairs consulting firm specializing in building and translating scientific evidence; navigating policy; and creating compelling communications strategies for various audiences. NOD's team of registered dietitian nutritionists and communications experts has extensive expertise in *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* development and implementation, food assistance programs, coalition-building, influencer partnerships, thought leadership and stakeholder engagement, research and evaluation, and consumer and marketplace trend analysis and application.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our research and perspectives; we're ready and eager to support the White House Conference, as well as the strategic roadmap that is unveiled in September, to help all Americans enjoy more fruits and vegetables for happier, healthier lifestyles. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or additional research needs.

Respectfully,

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