



American Society for Nutrition
Excellence in Nutrition Research and Practice

December 18, 2020

President-Elect Joe Biden

Dear President-Elect Biden and Transition Team Leaders,

The American Society for Nutrition (ASN) congratulates you on your recent election to the Presidency of the United States of America. ASN is a not-for-profit, professional scientific society dedicated to bringing together the world's top researchers to advance our knowledge and application of nutrition. ASN has more than 7,500 members throughout the world, working in government, clinical practice, academia, and industry, to conduct research that helps all Americans live longer, healthier lives. As you move forward in your efforts, we offer our Society as an independent resource with expertise in nutrition.

Increase Investments in Nutrition Science and Innovation –

ASN supports your efforts to advance science, technology, and innovation, and urges the incoming Administration to maintain a federal commitment to research, as nutrition research dramatically improves the quality of life for Americans and people around the world each day. The return on investment in basic and applied research, while often extraordinary, is unpredictable and materializes over the long term. Sustained funding for research is necessary to support our nation's investments in research and innovation that lead to lifesaving discoveries. Support for basic and applied research will help the U.S. maintain its global competitiveness and success. ASN brings to your attention the enclosed *ASN Nutrition Research Priorities* from the report "*Nutrition research to affect food and a healthy life span*" ([Am J Clin Nutr 2013](#)), as examples of research that will help to sustain and improve the lives of all Americans with the necessary investment, resources, and support.

Increased federal investments in the primary federal agencies that support nutrition research, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area, will lead to advances and breakthroughs in nutrition, and lead to healthier citizens, a stronger economy, and a more globally competitive America. Adequate funding for food and agricultural research is critical to provide a safe and nutritious food supply for the world's population, to preserve the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace, and to provide jobs and revenue crucial to support the U.S. economy.

Rebuild the Human Capacity of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Economic Research Service (ERS) -

A critical task will be to focus efforts on rebuilding the human capacity of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Economic Research Service (ERS). These important REE agencies were moved from Washington, DC to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2019, with both agencies losing more than 75% of their staff in doing so. Support for NIFA and ERS should be a priority for the incoming Administration in order to achieve these much needed

breakthroughs, as both remain significantly understaffed.

Increase Investments in Health and Nutrition Surveillance and Data Monitoring -

Increased federal investment in health and nutrition surveillance and data monitoring is also crucial. Nutrition monitoring conducted by the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a unique and critically important surveillance function in which dietary intake, nutritional status, and health status are evaluated in a rigorous and standardized manner. (ARS is responsible for food and nutrient databases and the "What We Eat in America" (WWEIA) dietary survey, while CDC tracks nutritional status and health parameters through the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).) This is an invaluable source of data that has been and can continue to be used to address major health issues as they arise, including COVID-19. Nutrition monitoring findings are essential for multiple government agencies, as well as the public and private sector to track what Americans are eating, inform nutrition and dietary guidance policy, evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of nutrition assistance programs, and study nutrition-related disease outcomes. Nutrition and health data, largely collected through NHANES, are essential for tracking the nutrition, health, and well-being of the American population, and are especially important for observing nutritional and health trends in our nation's children. Because of past funding deficiencies, some food composition database entries do not reflect the realities of the current food supply, which may negatively impact programs and policies based on this information. It is estimated that more than 2000 new food items are available for sale each month in the US. It is imperative that ARS and CDC continue to receive increased support to update food and nutrient databases and to continue critical surveillance of the nation's nutritional status and the many benefits it provides. This will help ensure uninterrupted collection of vital health and nutrition statistics and help cover the costs needed for technology and information security maintenance and upgrades that are necessary to replace aging survey infrastructure. In addition, increased support should be provided to enhance the reliability of these extremely important datasets. For example, NHANES could be expanded to include more biomarkers of exposure and nutritional status and USDA databases could be expanded to include information on food additives, colors, and other important information.

Prioritize Support for Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs –

ASN enthusiastically supports work in the four initial priority areas of the incoming Biden Administration: the pandemic, climate change, racial equity, and economic recovery. Nutrition is intrinsically tied to each of these priority areas, impacting the food, nutrition, and health of our nation. Disparities in health outcomes along both racial and economic lines are becoming increasingly evident in the face of the pandemic. There is an urgent need for food and nutrition support in our country that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Minority populations disproportionately impacted by health disparities also have socioeconomic inequalities and reduced access to health care, healthful foods, and safe places to be active. There may be no more important time to accelerate scientific discoveries at the nexus of food, nutrition, and

public health.

Provide Continuous Support for Federal Nutrition Recommendations –

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs) are critically important in that they form the basis of federal nutrition policy and programs, guide local, state, and national health promotion and disease prevention initiatives for public health agencies, health care providers, and educational institutions, and inform products developed and marketed by the food and beverage industry. However, the DGAs do not have dedicated funding. It is imperative to secure funding to support the implementation and coordination of the 2020-2025 DGAs among federal agencies and to ensure the research gaps and opportunities from the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Scientific Report are addressed. Dedicated funding is also necessary to allow the responsible agencies to improve preparation and development for the 2025-2030 DGA process. In addition, ASN strongly urges the government to ensure needed updates of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) to provide current, accurate data with which to identify nutrients of public health concern and other nutrient needs to be used in the development of the DGAs.

Continue the Work of the Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research -

We also call your attention to the enclosed white paper, “*Strengthening national nutrition research: Rationale and options for a new coordinated federal research effort and authority*” ([Am J Clin Nutr 2020](#)). ASN proposes that the work of the trans-federal government Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research continue to allow for increased harmonization of and more effective nutrition Initiatives. This Committee is charged with improving the planning, coordination, and communication among federal agencies engaged in nutrition research. Nutrition work currently takes place across multiple departments, including the Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, and USDA. To cover the full spectrum from prevention to treatment, improved coordination of nutrition policy, research, and programs must occur at leadership levels across the federal government.

Establish a Senior-level Position as Coordinator of Nutrition-related Initiatives -

ASN suggests that the Administration establish a senior-level position to serve as the federal government’s overall coordinator of nutrition-related initiatives. This individual would serve as a liaison across all government agencies and to the private sector and would ideally be a distinguished scientist in the field of nutrition science. As suggested in the white paper “*Strengthening national nutrition research: Rationale and options for a new coordinated federal research effort and authority*” ([Am J Clin Nutr 2020](#)), this may include a new Office of the National Director of Food and Nutrition (ONDFN). Such an office would be led by a principal food and nutrition advisor to the White House, who would serve as the President’s advisor on all issues related to food and nutrition research.

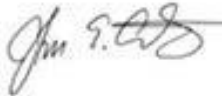
Convene a Broad Dialogue to Strengthen and Coordinate Federal Nutrition Research -

ASN also recommends that the Administration convene a broad dialogue to assess the gaps and

options to strengthen and coordinate federal nutrition research to address the many escalating diet-related health burdens and related economic, equity, national security, and sustainability challenges facing our nation. Such a dialogue is needed now more than ever given the complex nutrition issues currently affecting our nation to advance viable solutions. ASN would be happy to generate a public platform for discussion of health and wellness issues related to nutrition. ASN is uniquely positioned to foster an open dialogue on nutrition-related topics between academia, clinicians, government, and industry. Such a dialogue could lead to a new US Global Nutrition Research Program, charged with improving coordination and integration of federal research on food and nutrition and implications for the country as suggested in the white paper on strengthening national nutrition research.

ASN stands ready and welcomes opportunities to assist the incoming Administration and the Transition Teams on nutrition-related initiatives and issues. Please feel free to contact me at 240-428-3643 or jcourtney@nutrition.org if ASN may provide additional information or be of assistance in pursuit of improving the health and well-being of all Americans.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John E. Courtney", is positioned above the printed name.

John E. Courtney, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer