



JULY 2016

# VOTE FOOD 2016: BETTER FOOD, BETTER HEALTH

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[The next President of the United States] needs to think about food broadly in a comprehensive way that recognizes the importance of food safety, but also food security; the issues of quality and nutrition; the linkage of our food system to other major pressing public health concerns, such as antibiotic resistance and the use of antibiotics in animal agriculture; [and] the relationship of food production to broader environmental concerns. Food production is the leading cause of environmental degradation today, which is no small problem for this country and for the world. [Food] is a complex arena, and we need to address it in all its many components.

- The Honorable Margaret Hamburg, Former Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration. Vote Food 2016, June 3, 2016



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Conference participants included:

**The Honorable Donna Shalala**, Former Secretary, United States Department of Health and Human Services; **The Honorable Daniel Glickman**, Former Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture; **The Honorable Margaret Hamburg**, Former Commissioner, United States Food and Drug Administration; **Sonia Angell**, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Prevention and Primary Care, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; **Doug O'Brien**, Senior Policy Advisor for Rural Affairs, White House Domestic Policy Council; **Sarah Roache**, Associate, O'Neill Institute; **Michael Jacobson**, President, Center for Science in the Public Interest; **Bruce Silverglade**, Principal Attorney, OFW Law; **Deb Atwood**, Executive Director, AGree; **Aliza Glasner**, Associate, O'Neill Institute; **Marland Buckner**, Co-Founder and CEO, ForeverView Farms; **Mike Lavender**, Washington Representative, Food & Agriculture, Union of Concerned Scientists; and **Manel Kappagoda**, Program Director and Senior Staff Attorney, ChangeLab Solutions.

The entire conference and all of the proceedings are available at:

<http://www.c-span.org/search/?searchtype=All&query=georgetown+Vote+Food>

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## Executive Summary

Food is at the center of American lives, and should be at the center of its policies. The next President of the United States has the opportunity to improve public health, the environment and the U.S. economy by prioritizing the complex arena of the U.S. food system. Based largely on the discourse and ideas generated at **Vote Food 2016: Better Food, Better Health**, a conference hosted by the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University Law Center, this White Paper offers four principal recommendations to guide the incoming administration, public leaders and other interested stakeholders to implement an integrated and holistic approach to food policy. These recommendations are as follows:

### ***1) Ensure coordination and collaboration across the complex U.S. food arena;***

The key to achieving greater productivity, efficiency and better health outcomes is to increase coordination and collaboration among federal agencies and other stakeholders including producers, farmers, advocates and consumers. The next President should appoint a high-level policy advisor based in the White House, to work exclusively on coordinating and facilitating the development of a comprehensive plan for federal food policy across the administration and among interested stakeholders.

### ***2) Rely on science, evidence and education;***

Policymakers across all levels of government should commit to relying on science to inform policy. Support for evidence-based decision-making requires the next administration to foster a culture of transparency, trust and reliability within government institutions as well as among industry and the public.

### ***3) Establish funding and priorities; and***

Meaningful reform and true progress in America's food system will require more funding to address critical issues facing public health and the environment. The next administration should prioritize funding for these fundamental issues: 1) eliminating hunger, 2) ensuring the success of the Food Safety Modernization Act, and 3) creating a twenty-first century U.S. agricultural research enterprise.

### ***4) Value where local policy can lead national policy.***

Innovation at the state and local level is the engine of important advances in national public health policy. As innovators, local governments often move more nimbly, effectively, and quickly than the federal government. Local policy, and the lessons learned, provides a laboratory for national evaluation, priority-setting, strategy, and decision-making.

A firm commitment to each of these principles will enable the incoming administration and other stakeholders invested in this country's domestic policy to develop and implement a comprehensive and effective food policy. Such a commitment is necessary to ensure the health, prosperity and welfare of America's citizens and to the efficacy of a wide range of other critical policy initiatives, including those related to our environment, industrial economy and national security.



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## Ensure coordination and collaboration across the complex U.S. food arena

*Leadership starts at the top.*

In the United States, more than 15 federal agencies share responsibility for regulating the U.S. food supply. Though calls to consolidate responsibility across the federal government are periodically made, the necessary political capital to take on such an initiative would be more effectively spent on working to make improvements within the current infrastructure. The key to achieving greater productivity, efficiency and better health outcomes is to increase coordination and collaboration among federal agencies and other stakeholders including producers, farmers, advocates and consumers.

Effective coordination requires a single point of responsibility and leadership; but no president has ever appointed a single person or agency to guide federal activities related to food. The next president should appoint a high-level policy advisor based in the White House to work exclusively on coordinating and facilitating the development of a comprehensive plan for federal food policy across the administration. The advisor would also work with the president's cabinet and all the relevant agencies on implementation. The main purpose of this position is to harmonize all of the administration's objectives related to food with the express goal of reducing redundancy and increasing efficiency. This position could fall within the Domestic Policy Council or other office, but must have the capacity to set and enforce the administration's policy and programmatic priorities throughout the many departments, agencies and offices working on matters relating to food.

Because food issues are largely cross-cutting problems requiring interagency solutions, the president must appoint someone with the knowledge, experience, and character necessary to develop and drive constructive consensus on federal food policy. Subject-matter expertise and a broad view of the food system in the U.S. are critical to this position's success. Skills to foster the right connectivity, communication and collaboration among agencies, and other nontraditional alliances, including with civil-society and industry, are also crucial in driving true solutions and achieving better outcomes.

*Government and industry should focus on opportunities for connectivity and partnership.*

In the United States, effective public health policy is often created by a multi-stakeholder iterative process, this is especially true when it comes to dealing with food-related issues. Government policymakers must consider how to stimulate cross-disciplinary conversation and otherwise promote an environment where connectivity can happen. The government should consider nontraditional synergies to incentivize the food industry to produce and sell more healthy foods to encourage public health objectives.



For example, in 2011, following the success of several voluntary private worksite wellness initiatives, where companies committed to selling healthier food options on site, President Obama set out to create a similar plan to encourage healthy eating for all federal employees. The *Health & Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions & Vending Operations* established food service procurement guidelines designed to make healthy choices more accessible, more appealing, and more affordable to federal employees and visitors to federal properties. The standards also included recommendations that vendors price healthy items more cheaply than unhealthy items. All contractors servicing the federal government were required to follow the guidelines.

Annually, federal concessions and vending operations reach an estimated 22 million government employees; approximately 2.2 million people incarcerated in U.S. jails and prisons; as well as the millions of people passing through government-owned property. More than 292 million people visited the National Parks alone in 2014. Consequently, food procurement policies in government settings will effectively impact the food choices of hundreds of millions of people in the U.S.

The government must recognize the degree to which innovation initiates in the private sector, and therefore, where appropriate, nurture programs, such as the vending machine procurement guidelines, where government and the private sector collaborate to encourage healthy innovation and market-based programs.

### *Stop reinventing the wheel.*

When it comes to more sustainable practices for growing food, the government should foster, facilitate and encourage an environment for information sharing. Utilizing existing knowledge and sharing best practices should be central to better food policy. A central coordinator in the White House would be well-situated to make the necessary connections among federal agencies, state governments, civil-society and the private sector working on similar objectives. For example, in an era of global warming and devastating droughts, water conservation practices must be paramount to the next administration's core food policy objectives. At present, 80 percent of this nation's consumptive water usage is dedicated to agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Many farmers, ranchers and other food producers have instituted more sustainable practices to reduce water consumption. Such practices must expand to all food producers in order to mark a meaningful reduction in water usage. When it comes to combatting antibiotic resistance, many companies have raced ahead of federal policy to reduce or eliminate the use of antibiotics in livestock intended for human consumption. Sharing these strategies and best practices means that others do not need to reinvent the wheel. The government should play a role in cultivating an environment and creating incentives for knowledge sharing to achieve its goals.

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1. Irrigation & Water Use, U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, last modified June 15, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-practices-management/irrigation-water-use.aspx>.



Information sharing also brings the added benefit of increasing transparency, an issue of growing significance to the general public (see section on data and communication for further discussion).

## **Rely on science, evidence and education**

“Government has to make science-based decisions, and we have to explain it to the public and get a level of comfortable science literacy.”

- The Honorable Donna Shalala, Former Secretary Department of Health and Human Services, Vote Food 2016, June 3, 2016

*Make meaningful investments in science and utilize those investments.*

Reliable, quality data is an effective tool for designing the right policy, regulation or law to reach a given issue. Effective problem solving must be steeped in sound science and informed by evidence. Creating data-rich and evidence-based policies will pave the way for constructive ongoing systemic change.

Often experts know what research or data are missing to make better public health decisions, but they lack the resources to support necessary research efforts. Lack of investment in disease surveillance with respect to antimicrobial resistance provides a prime example. In recent years, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) took critical steps to eliminate the use of antibiotics in animals for growth promotion purposes, a scientifically accepted measure to combat antimicrobial resistance in humans. Yet, scientific understanding of the pathology of resistance through the use of antibiotics in agriculture and the actual mechanics causing resistance to important drugs for human use is limited. To truly understand resistance in humans, FDA needs more data regarding how antibiotics are used on the farm. FDA knows which data are missing, but they lack the resources to collect the information. In fiscal year 2016, Congress did not appropriate any new resources to support FDA's work on antibiotic resistance. Consequently, badly needed law and policy to retard the spread of antibiotic resistance—an immediate and real danger to public health across the globe—is hamstrung by limited resources and lack of government commitment.

*Educate policymakers to be champions of evidence-based policymaking.*

Effecting change is dependent upon informed policymakers. Federal and state agencies investing in research and creating empirical data must ensure that their efforts are candidly and clearly communicated to rule makers within agencies as well as to the legislatures who must rely on the data to vote on new Congressional initiatives. Politics and economics will always



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be a part of the policy making process, but it is important for the next administration to prioritize actual evidence.

*Bring the science back to consumers to generate transparency and trust.*

In today's connected world, policymakers need to not just recognize, but embrace the reality that marketing and access to information, whether science-based or otherwise, drives consumer interest. A snapshot of the debate concerning labeling of genetically modified foods illustrates the point that perception and opinion are easily swayed when fear, politics and persuasive marketing trump science and evidence.

In 2017, government should focus on ensuring consumers have actual and accessible data upon which to make intelligent, informed and healthy choices. When it comes to science, transparency and independence are fundamental. Government must not only lead in stimulating empirical research, but also communicating the results in a reliable and digestible format. Consumers need to feel a level of trust in government-led research and information. Investing in effective and transparent communication strategies is crucial to gaining consumer confidence and trust in science-based policy.

## **Establish funding and priorities**

Food is a fundamental part of life for every American every day. Food is an economic issue, accounting for 13 percent of personal household expenditures, behind only housing and transportation costs.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, food and agricultural-related industries contributed \$878 billion to U.S. gross domestic product.<sup>3</sup> Food is a labor issue, providing 17 million jobs in agriculture, food services and manufacturing.<sup>4</sup> Food production is an environmental issue, consuming approximately 80% of this nation's fresh water supply.<sup>5</sup> Food is also a health issue, costing Americans more than \$300 billion each year in medical costs and in decreased productivity related to obesity.<sup>6</sup> The list goes on.

These points illustrate that food is fundamentally intertwined with each of the overarching themes dominating the debate this election season: the environment, water, immigration, domestic and global security, civil rights, education, justice, and economic opportunity. The

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2. "What is Agriculture's Share of the Overall U.S. Economy?"; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, last modified February 17, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/detail.aspx?chartId=40037&ref=collection&embed=True&widgetId=39734> citing USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Value Added by Industry Series.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. "Irrigation & Water Use."

6. Eric Pianin, "New Lifetime Estimate of Obesity Costs: \$92,235 Per Person," *The Fiscal Times*, May 15, 2015, <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2015/05/15/New-Lifetime-Estimate-Obesity-Costs-92235-person>.





next administration cannot effectively begin to address any of these issues, without considering the U.S. food system.

When it comes to prioritizing funding, the next administration should prioritize funding for these fundamental issues: 1) eliminate hunger, 2) ensure the success of the Food Safety Modernization Act, and 3) create a 21st century U.S. agricultural research enterprise.

*Eliminate food insecurity.*

The next administration should make eliminating food insecurity in the United States – actual hunger as well as lack of access to healthy food - one of its top priorities. Hunger and poor nutrition inhibit individual growth and opportunity, tax the workforce and the economy, and create general instability for approximately 49 million Americans, including 15.8 million children.<sup>7</sup> Annually, 86 million adults in America are at risk for type 2 diabetes,<sup>8</sup> a disease that cost Americans \$245 billion in 2012.<sup>9</sup> Improving nutrition improves individual health as well as the national economy.

*Ensure the success of the Food Safety Modernization Act.*

Passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) provides a prime example of the limits of policy without the requisite investment. In 2009, Congress passed the most historic undertaking in the history of food safety in this country, shifting the nation's focus on food safety from reaction to prevention. FSMA is predicated on the reality that preventing food borne illness is not only optimal for health, but also offers tremendous fiscal promise by reducing preventable health care costs to U.S. households and employers, otherwise strengthening the economy through improving worker health and productivity, and preventing serious problems that increase food production costs and undermine public confidence. Yet, Congress has yet to fully fund FSMA, sharply reducing both its public health and fiscal benefits.

Twenty-first century food policy must holistically address the global challenges food, nutrition, health and agriculture consign on society and the environment. At present, many immediate challenges have been identified – population growth and urbanization, water scarcity, emerging infectious disease, water scarcity and climate change, to name a few – but

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7. "U.S. Food Insecurity," *Clinton Global Initiative*, <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/about-us/calls-to-action/us-food-insecurity>.

8. "A Call to Presidential Action," *AGree*, [http://www.foodandagpolicy.org/sites/default/files/AGree\\_POTUS\\_Briefing\\_Paper\\_Jan2016.pdf](http://www.foodandagpolicy.org/sites/default/files/AGree_POTUS_Briefing_Paper_Jan2016.pdf) citing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2014: Estimates of Diabetes and Its Burden in the United States, 2014, Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Note: 2012 data. Risk for Type 2 Diabetes is defined as incidence of prediabetes among people aged 20 years or older.

9. "A Call to Presidential Action," *American Diabetes Association*, "Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2012," *Diabetes Care* 36.4 (2013): 1033-1046.





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more research and innovation is needed to mitigate immediate damage while also ensuring sufficient production of food, water and a healthy environment for generations to come.

*Create a 21st century U.S. agricultural research enterprise.*

Agricultural research and innovation are key to economic growth,<sup>10</sup> promising a significant net social return.<sup>11</sup> Creating a 21st century U.S. agricultural research enterprise requires careful analysis of existing programs to ensure the best use of existing resources, as well as a commitment to increase public spending to meet the world's most pressing challenges. The next administration should commit more fiscal support for academic research, land grants, and public financing for related activities. Additionally, the next administration should consider policies which will create:

- A shift in U.S. research priorities to align with emerging challenges and opportunities;
- A strong emphasis on transdisciplinary, long-term, global, and systems-based research;
- Near- and long-term reforms to shift where and how funds are allocated; and
- Increased federal appropriations for food and agricultural research, as reforms are achieved.<sup>12</sup>

## Value where local policy can lead national policy

### *New York City: A food policy laboratory*<sup>13</sup>

“If we really care about health, we have to care about food.”

- Sonia Angell, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Prevention and Primary Care, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
Vote Food 2016, June 3, 2016

Innovation at the state and local level is the engine of important advances in national public health policy. As innovators, local governments often move more nimbly, effectively, and

10. Executive Office of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, *Report to the President on Agricultural Preparedness and The Agriculture Research Enterprise*, December 2012, Washington, DC, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast\\_agriculture\\_20121207.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast_agriculture_20121207.pdf).

11. Philip G. Pardey, Julien M. Alston, and Connie Chang-Kang, *Public Food and Agricultural Research in the United States: The Rise and Decline of Public Investments, and Policies for Renewal*, *AGree*, April 2013, <http://www.foodandagpolicy.org/sites/default/files/AGree-Public%20Food%20and%20Ag%20Research%20in%20US-Apr%202013.pdf>.

12. “Research & Innovation: Strengthening Agricultural Research,” *AGree*, <http://foodandagpolicy.org/content/researchandinnovation>.

13. This section is adapted by the keynote address delivered by Sonia Angell, MD MPH, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Prevention and Primary Care, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. For Dr. Angell's full remarks, please visit <http://www.c-span.org/video/?410530-4/food-public-health-keynote-speaker-1>].





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quickly than the federal government. Local policy, and the lessons learned, provide a laboratory for national evaluation, priority-setting, strategy, and decision-making.

Arguably no city has provided more leadership on connecting the dots between food, chronic disease and health than New York City (NYC). The framework under which NYC creates food-oriented health policy initiatives provides a tremendous blueprint for public health policymakers at all levels of government. The following is a synopsis of the ideological framework under which NYC organizes its policy initiatives.

1) *Change the context* – Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice.

Food policy aimed at promoting better health and reducing the incidence of chronic disease must appreciate the context of the community it aims to serve. Diet-induced health problems are rooted in the social determinants inherent in a given environment—race, poverty, education, inequality, and housing. Understanding the context underlying a given health problem should be central to any health-focused policy aimed at creating impactful and lasting change.

For example, in an effort to better understand the context of type 2 diabetes in NYC  2006 the NYC Board of Health mandated the reporting of all lab work measuring Hemoglobin A1c levels to a citywide registry. Using this data, the NYC Department of Health was able to identify the geographic distribution and density of uncontrolled type 2 diabetes. Researchers found hotspots of uncontrolled diabetes clustered in specific NYC housing developments.  response, NYC sent community health workers into the identified housing developments to investigate why these communities were experiencing high concentrations of individuals with uncontrolled diabetes. At the same time, the community health workers were able to help residents addresses some of the issues related to diabetes control, including understanding the food environment and gaining access to resources to improve diet. This study is ongoing and NYC is currently evaluating the program to better understand its impact on health outcomes.

2) *Power of Integration* – Ensure food markets, policy, health, wellness, access and security all come together.

Designing effective food policy requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that considers the spectrum of forces contributing to a given problem. Such an approach considers the needs of individual stakeholders like manufacturers, distributors, city agencies, hospitals, restaurants, points of grocery purchase, and consumers. Good food policy also asks where the best opportunities for intervention are: Can the problem be mitigated by industry reformulation? Who has procurement power? Is there a role for feeding programs or specific labeling of foods? How can the policy utilize marketing and media awareness campaigns? What is the price point at which a particular behavior is encouraged? Is a goal best achieved by creating an incentive or disincentive towards consumption? What is the role of the individual? Is this a case of passive nudging by changing ingredients before the food reaches the consumer or are




we actively trying to change behaviors such as purchase or cooking habits?

Effective food policy must also consider the level of authority required to achieve a stated goal. Interventions may fall along a spectrum of authority ranging from voluntary guidance and information sharing to enforceable laws and regulations. Policy must also consider the realm of realistic authority and enforcement options to support and achieve the stated goals.

Local and state policy must also consider federal policy and concerns about preemption. At the same time, federal policy makers must tread carefully to avoid the tension of preemption. When local policies are adopted nationally, federal policy needs to be careful that policies do not obstruct additional innovation by cities and states.

### 3) *Data and Communication.*

Good policy decisions rely on good data. NYC's use of data to understand where and why certain populations in NYC were experiencing higher rates of, and more poorly controlled, type 2 diabetes is a tremendous example of how ining clinical data is an enormously effective tool in identifying issues and figuring out where large-scale prevention campaigns are needed.

In 2016, food policymakers should consider opportunities to marry clinical data with preventive services. The Obama Administration emphasized the significance of prioritizing prevention efforts when it comes to health. Most significantly, the Affordable Care Act promised value-based care focused on outcomes. In other words, doctors should be rewarded for a healthy outcomes as opposed to treatment per service. The Obama Administration also pledged \$200 million to support precision medicine initiatives specifically aimed at creating data to better understand individual health.<sup>14</sup>

The goal of each of these initiatives is to stem the tide of new patients entering the clinical environment in the first place. The question for policymakers is how to translate data collected in the clinical environment into programs focused on prevention. Here, it is important to remember that the people collecting clinical data are often not the same as the public health and policy individuals designing preventive interventions. Collaboration at the early stages among multiple stakeholders, in particular epidemiologists, clinicians and policymakers, can help to produce more productive, efficient and effective outcomes. Moreover, the entire precision medicine initiative is premised on access to data and figuring out how to meaningfully translate raw data into effective health outcomes. The goals of the precision medicine initiative will be most effectively achieved if cities, states, and the federal government collaborate from the outset, in order to design creative, valuable and far-reaching initiatives.

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14. "FACT SHEET: Obama Administration Announces Key Actions to Accelerate Precision Medicine Initiative," *The White House*, February 25, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/25/fact-sheet-obama-administration-announces-key-actions-accelerate>.



*4) Information is empowering. Information helps individuals make better choices.*

Whether adding caloric content to menus or saltshaker icons next to foods with high sodium content, empowering consumers with knowledge is fundamental to the success of individual policies. Consumers must understand the particular health problem policymakers aim to address and why a given program or policy is necessary to achieve the desired health outcome. Transparency and accessible data are key features of a successful health-related education campaign.

Still, policy makers must also remember that information only goes so far. Consumers must not only have information about making healthy choices, but also access to the promoted choice as well. For example, encouraging consumption of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is meaningless if the individual cannot afford or easily obtain the suggested produce. When consumers are empowered to make better choices through education coupled with policy focused on providing the necessary conditions to support the policy's goal, healthier outcomes are more readily achieved.

## **2016. Opportunities for the next administration**

The next administration will have the opportunity to change the lives of all Americans by adopting a broad and systematic approach to food policy. Accordingly, pursuit of the recommendations outlined in this white paper should serve as a top priority: (1) the next president should appoint a central point of leadership focused on coordination and collaboration across the complex web of regulatory agencies, government bodies and private stakeholders that impact the U.S. food arena. (2) The next administration must insist that lawmakers rely on sound science and evidence to guide policy concerning America's food supply; and that this information is effectively communicated to the American people. (3) Change will not take place without a commitment at all levels of government to funding new and existing programs. (4) Policies do not need to reinvent the wheel. Though much remains to be improved, the U.S. already boasts one of the safest and most robust food systems in the world. The U.S. should continue to foster and learn from its own example by examining how to translate local success into national policy.

Food is at the center of American lives, and should be at the center of its policies. In 2016, vote food.