

Sunita Sohrabji

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All right, let's begin. Welcome to today's American Community

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Media Zoom news briefing. I'm Senita Sarabji, health editor at ACOM and your

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moderator for today. The US Department of Health and Human Services together

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with the USDA announced a new food pyramid on January 7th as part of the

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2025 2030 dietary guidelines for Americans.

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The new food pyramid differs from previous federal nutrition guidelines by

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inverting the traditional hierarchy of foods. Instead of emphasizing grains as

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the foundation, the new model prioritizes protein, full fat dairy,

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healthy fats, fruits, and vegetables by while placing whole grains at the very

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bottom. It discourages refined carbohydrates, added sugars, and highly

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processed foods, but it almost doubles the recommended protein intake of

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previous pyramids. Speakers this week will analyze the new guidelines

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with a special focus on school lunch nutrition and traditional ethnic diets.

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They will also discuss ultrarprocessed foods and HHS's state's goal of

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eliminating harmful additives particularly in snacks. Speakers will

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also discuss the environmental impacts of consuming more red meat and factory

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farming. We invite reporters to post their questions in the chat and we will

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take questions from reporters immediately after each speaker presents. We will also send a video and followup

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materials after today's briefing. We ask speakers to speak slowly for our

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simultaneous interpreters in Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish. Our panelists

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today are Dr. Marian Nestle, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public

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health emerita at New York University. Miss Nestle also served as the senior

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nutrition policy adviser at HHS. Dr. Christopher Gardner, professor of

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medicine at Stanford University's School of Medicine, and Dr. Sesh Raalo, founder

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of Climate Healers. Welcome to all of our speakers. Thank you for joining us

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today. We begin first with Dr. Christopher Gardner who will provide an overall analysis of the new pyramid. Dr.

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Gardner will also drill down on the impact to school nutrition programs. Welcome Dr. Gardner.

Dr. Christopher Gardner

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Thank you so much for having me. Hope everybody can hear. Yeah, this has been an interesting topic ever since those

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new guidelines got released on January 8th. And can we start with the iconic pyramid that is part of the

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discussion today. So, we had a pyramid when all this started back in 1990ish.

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Nobody really liked the pyramid to be perfectly honest. At one point, it was the pyramid. Then it was my pyramid.gov
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and it was tailored for different individuals. And in 2011, Michelle Obama helped switch that iconic figure to a
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plate, which was a lot easier to understand. Half your plate should be veggies and fruits. You should have some
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whole grains on there and some different protein sources. So there was a lot of politics involved. I happened to be
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involved in this round um dietary guidelines advisory committee
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which ever since Marian's days when she worked on this has pretty much been instituted where a group of 20
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scientists would be asked for two years prior to the update to review all new
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evidence and recommend in an advisory way, not a demanding way. in an advisory
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way to the secretaries of health and human services and agriculture how they
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might update the guidelines based on new evidence. And so participating that for
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two years was a very rewarding experience and we handed the advisory off to the secretaries at the time when
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the administration had just changed over from Biden to Trump and so somewhat to
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our surprise we handed this off to RFK Jr. who pretty much very vocally on
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social media dismissed our report, said it was too complicated, it was too long, and they would come up with a new
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approach for this. And we waited for a year to come out, a little more than a year. And when it came out, here was
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this upside down pyramid. Thought, who brought the pyramid back?
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We got rid of this a long time ago. And why is it upside down? And I just want
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to give a quick take on why I think it's upside down. So if you actually look at
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all the different 10 or so different domains of recommendations,
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most of them are consistent with old recommendations. So there's really a lot of sound advice in the new dietary
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guidelines. But I have heard from the current administration that they feel this is a dramatic shift. Nothing like
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this has happened in the last 40 years. This is staggering how they're going to
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clean up the American food system. And Mary and I had the privilege of
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being on sort of a preview call for this and we thought, well, yeah, most of that is pretty sound. And I think they were a
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little upset hearing that advice, thinking, no, no, no, this is a huge turnaround. And so I actually take the
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flipping of the pyramid as being a sensationalist approach to say this is so radical that we have
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flipped the whole pyramid upside down. To be honest, the pyramid itself is a little hard to interpret. The veggies
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and fruits are scattered up and down. Senita, you had mentioned that they are still promoting whole grains. And in
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fact, they say two to four servings of whole grains a day, but they've moved it to the bottom of the upside down flipped
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pyramid. And it looks like that is the thing you should have the least of. But if you should have two to four grains of
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whole grains, that's that part's confusing. A lot of different people have tried to put things together about

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10% saturated fat as a limit with beef tallow and butter and red meat and three
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servings of whole fat dairy a day. So I think if you read the whole text
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it's clearer than looking at the pyramid itself. So let me just drill down on a
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couple one just two things. So one of the main points that our dietary
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guidelines advisory committee came up with was we suggested across multiple
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domains that we have looked at a consistent message that we're seeing is
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more legumes which are beans, peas and lentils. Americans don't usually use the word legumes so we often said beans,
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peas and lentils and less red and processed meat. That was one of our main
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conclusions to the secretaries. And so it was a bit of a slap in the face to see that the pyramid had a big stake in
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the upper left hand corner of the pyramid and RFK Jr. came out on social media
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immediately afterwards saying beef is back, butter is back, meat is back.
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That that was very hard to hear given the the recommendations that we had just
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made. and prioritizing protein at every meal
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and taking what has been an established number for many decades about how much protein to get relative to your weight
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and practically doubling that. That was protein has never been a
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nutrient of concern in these dietary guidelines. And I given how much protein
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is being promoted in the grocery stores these days, protein Pop-Tarts, protein water, protein everything, I feel like
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Americans are going to think, "Wow, maybe all that is justified." But maybe the reason all those products have
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protein is because we were only recommending half as much as was needed before. And that's really not true at
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all. So that has bothered a lot of health professionals. So, in the new guidelines, they do say
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lentils, peas, beans, things like that. But they also say red meat and all the
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other things. So, I'm a little worried that Americans are going to think, "Yes, I should have the protein Pop-Tarts and I should have the protein
water and I
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should have meat because that's how Americans think of protein." Now, let me just take the last minute of my time and
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switch over to schools and then I'm happy to take some questions. So, I think Marian is going to address the
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ultraprocessed food and the the sugar, which is which is really great. A lot of us are applauding how strongly they're
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coming down on added sugar and ultraprocessed food. School lunch has too many of those. School lunch is an
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important issue because as much as many Americans don't even follow the dietary guidelines for Americans, one of the
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places where they have the biggest impact is when it's a safety net system in the federal government and they're
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required to follow the dietary guidelines. So, how are schools going to implement this? So, I love the idea of
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getting out ultraprocessed food and sugar. I'm concerned about prioritizing protein in the meals of our school
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lunches. And I'm really not seeing a lot of direction and support of taking those

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foods out, incentivizing the food industry to provide the healthier foods

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and allowing school lunch more funding. They've always been um handcuffed by not

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having enough funding to provide healthy foods for school. In fact, over

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I think it was uh just months ago that they took a billion dollars away of funds that were related to COVID that

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were related to programs buying putting a little more money into local produce etc. So instead of adding money they've

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recently taken away money. So I think for the rest of the conversation we'll hear a lot from our other two speakers

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about how would you implement these new guidelines with three servings of whole fat dairy a day prioritizing protein

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saying whole fat or whole grains are good but moving them to the bottom of the food pyramid. How is a school lunch

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food service director going to take that advice and use the funding that they have to improve the

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school lunch quality of our kids? So, finish off. There's a lot of really good

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advice in there, but it's not very radical. and some of the issues like

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protein and whole grains and three servings of whole fat dairy a day when a m a majority of the world's population

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is lactose intolerant is really insensitive. So let me see if I could take any

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questions after having shared that.

Sunita Sohrabji

Well, there are a lot of questions for you but I'm going to start with one. Dr.

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Gardner. Numerous studies suggest a link between meat and full fatty and dairy

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full fat dairy consumption and greater risk for heart disease, diabetes, and

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other chronic illnesses. Should we expect to see a greater epidemic of

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cardiovascular disease in the coming years as more Americans follow this

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basic food pyramid?

Dr. Christopher Gardner

Well, Americans don't really follow the food pyramid and they already

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they already eat too much meat, but if they were to follow these Yes. So, I do

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a lot of work with the American Heart Association. These guidelines are not consistent with American Heart. They say

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for your protein, get most of it from legumes and nuts and beans. And they do not recommend whole fat dairy. I would

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say the dairy part of whole fat is a different issue that we do not have time for today as opposed to the the whole

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the saturated fat from lard and meat and bacon and other things. I'm not really

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all that upset about whole fat milk in schools, especially if it was compared

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to chocolate milk. Chocolate lowfat milk which wouldn't have the saturated fat

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but would have the sugar, right? And so yeah, I mean these are not the new

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guidelines are not consistent with American heart.

Sunita Sohrabji

Absolutely. Low-fat chocolate milk was

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what we got as kids in school lunches in the 70s. So thinking about that, we have

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a lot of questions for you. Let's get to some of these. Um Henrietta Burroughs,

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would you please start with your question?

Question from media

Thanks so much, Sunnita. Uh Dr. Gardner,

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do you think the prioritizing of beef and butter in the new guidelines come

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came from the influence of the beef and dairy industries?

Dr. Christopher Gardner

Thank you for that question. So, you

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know, the politics of this are always pretty obvious, right? I mean, we have really powerful lobbyists in dairy and

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beef. I don't really think there's a leguminati uh lobbying component here where big

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bean is in there lobbying for more beans which we should have more of. I guess what was really hurtful as being part of

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the committee that I was on is we were slandered for having too many conflicts

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with food industry. So, in every single dietary guidelines update that's been

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released forever, when they get senior nutrition folks, many of them at some point or another have had some

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connection with the food industry. But the hypocrisy was just horrific when we

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were slandered for all of our connections and they chose a new committee of nine people who when they

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disclose their ties actually half of them had closer ties to dairy and beef

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than the original committee that was looking at this. I don't think there is any way to avoid politics here. One of

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the groups getting these guidelines out is the department of agriculture. The Department of Agriculture represents all

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egg. That means it represents beef and dairy and pork and chicken and at some

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level vegetables and fruits and beans, peas and lentils. But the the powerful

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lobbyists are more the meat and the dairy and the egg industry that are high

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in protein. So there is certainly politics involved. I don't think that will ever change. So we just have to

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have transparency about it and do what we can to address it beyond my capacity

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at this point. Interested in other people's perspectives.

Sunita Sohrabji

Thank you. Irene Diaz Basen has the next

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question. Irene, welcome. Please ask your question.

Question from media

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Yes, thank you. What a huh guidance do authorities give to parents regarding

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school meals? Would be advisable to send meals from home for minority families

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with limited financial resources? How can they meet the new nutrition

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guidelines without facing economic challenges? Thank you.

Dr. Christopher Gardner

Oh, it's such a good question. you know,

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wouldn't it be wonderful if parents had the time and the resources to make lunch

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and it didn't have to come from schools? Um, really part of the issue that school

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lunch is there is because so many parents don't have the resources and don't have the time. So many of our kids

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get a huge proportion of their calories from not only school lunch but school breakfast. I will add the perspective

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that there are parents who make horribly unhealthy lunches to send to school with

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their kids. I've seen places where they back in the days of Michelle Obama's

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healthy hunger-free kid act when they were making the school meals healthier,

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parents were showing up at the gates of the school and handing candy bars through the bars to their kids who were

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complaining that the foods were too healthy. So bringing parents into this is an important part and I think the

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parent angle of this is almost just as challenging. So do they have the time and do they have the resources? That is

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a challenge. Were they raised in such a way that they're prepared to give their kids a healthy lunch? Some of them

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just go for the simple uh convenient thing that comes out of the store that isn't all that healthy also. So I think

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it's a more challenging issue than just will the parents be able to replace

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this. That's that's a topic for a longer conversation but thank you for bringing that up.

Sunita Sohrabji

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Thank you. Are Martinez from La Pon has the next question. Are in the interest

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of time will you please ask the second portion of your question?

Question from media

Yes and I seen that um already um the

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other part was answered. So and and looking at these um recommendations

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and considering how much meat prices have increased um to what extent will we

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be able to follow this pyramid?

Dr. Christopher Gardner

I'm sorry I didn't quite catch that.

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There was a meat basita can you rephrase that?

Sunita Sohrabji

Yeah. Yes. So considering how much meat

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prices have risen, to what extent will we be able to adhere to this pyramid?

Dr. Christopher Gardner

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Oh well, I I would actually be happy if meat prices increased. I actually

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So the meat prices really are artificially low to be perfectly honest.

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There's there's different levels of support that allow meat to be low and part of that is our concentrated animal

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feeding operations that our other speaker today will address. I actually really think meat prices should be

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higher to reflect the true cost true cost of food and that if we had better quality meat and less meat that would be

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well in line with what most health professionals have recommended for a long time. I work a lot with a Culinary

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Institute of America with chefs that are making food taste great and they're pushing for a protein flip which is

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celebrating beans, peas, and lentils and vegetables at the center of the plate and having smaller portions of meat, not

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6 ounces, but 2 ounces. So, if the cost went up, but it was a smaller portion or

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a condiment or a side dish, that would actually, I think, be consistent with good health promotion, but not so much

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with this new food pyramid guideline that came out. And I think that's going to have to be the end of my contribution

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today because we have two other fabulous speakers. So, I think I'm gonna offer now, right?

Sunita Sohrabji

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Yes. Uh, but before you uh drop off, Dr. Gardner, could you give us your 30

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secondond soundbite? What most important piece of your conversation would you like reporters to take away?

Dr. Christopher Gardner

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Oh, I really like the push for eat real food. This has been fantastic. That's a

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big push. And they say a hu bigger push on getting rid of sugar and ultrarocessed foods. That's fantastic. I

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love that. But I would love to see them put some more emphasis in in terms of how would you follow up on that? Are you

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going to have regulatory maneuvers to get the food industry to stop producing all that if it's

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voluntary like it has been for colors and other things? What we've already seen is noM&M's have not stopped

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coloring their candies. No, Skittles have not stopped coloring their candies. If these are voluntary,

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it's going to be quite challenging. So I I have seen some strong language with what we need to push forward, but if

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it's voluntary, it it won't really happen.

Sunita Sohrabji

Dr. Gardner, thank you so much for

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taking the time to join us today. We uh our next speaker is Dr. Marian

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Nestle, author of many books, including What to Eat Now and the blog Food

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Politics. I'm going to ask Dr. Nestle a few questions and then we will move on

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to questions from reporters. So please enter your questions in the chat. Dr.

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Nestle, let's begin with this question. The guidelines tell Americans to reduce

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ultrarocessed foods, but most of the US food supply is in fact heavily

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processed. Do you think this advice places too much responsibility on individuals rather than addressing the

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structure of the food system? And uh to follow up, how does HHSneed to define

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more clearly what highly processed foods are?

Dr. Marian Nestle

Yeah, I'm first of all, I'm really happy

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to be here and to follow Christopher Gardner, whose work I admire a great deal. Um I want to make a couple of

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comments on what he said and this leads right into your question. Um I was on

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the dietary guidelines advisory committee in 1995 and that was a time at which the
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scientific advisory committee chose the research questions did the research wrote the research report and wrote the
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dietary guidelines. It was a scientific process. Today the scientific advisory
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committee writes the advisory committee's report. Its advisory the
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agencies take it over completely from there. Um and one of the issues that's
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very clearly stated in the new dietary guidelines and new pyramid um is that
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the the function of these documents is to educate the public so that the public
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can exercise its personal responsibility. And in fact uh Robert F. Kennedy Jr. uh
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made a statement just last week saying we are not going to do any legislation
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or regulation about this. That would be nanny state. We are educating the public
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about personal responsibility. And if the focus is on personal
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responsibility, then the government's role is in fact education.
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if you really want. But and the food industry loves that because the food
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industry knows perfectly well that education is not enough to change
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dietary behavior. If the if education was enough, then 40 years of pyramids
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and plates and whatever would have done the job and they haven't. And I, by the
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way, was a big fan of the first pyramid. The first pyramid which had meat and
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dairy at the top and grains and fruits and vegetables at the bottom was the
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product of 12 years of research, two kinds of research. Would the specifics
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of portion size and number of servings meet nutritional requirements?
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And did the public understand that uh what was at the top of the pyramid was
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what they were supposed to eat less of? And the pyramid won over many many many
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other designs. People did not like the upside down pyramid because they felt it was
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unbalanced and they did not like plates because they couldn't understand them.
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Um and in fact plates are much harder to understand than the pyramid. So the pyramid is a good design. It doesn't
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work upside down. And the one that we have now that was introduced in January
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is very meat centric. As Dr. Gardner said, it's it's a eat more meat pyramid
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and it's a eat whole fat dairy pyramid. Um and meat is um because protein is a
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you is understood by the public as a euphemism for meat and whole fat dairy
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is understood by the public as a euphemism for raw milk. So this pyramid
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so this pyramid of dietary guidelines without saying so explicitly

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are about eating real food. Fine. Love that message. But it's also about eating
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more meat and highfat dairy products and whole milk and raw raw milk as far as
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that goes. And there are many examples of the Secretary of Health and Human
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Services and the Secretary of Agriculture drinking raw milk posed with
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milk mustaches. Um and in fact the president of the United States posed with a milk mustache
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ad. So the personal responsibility message is one that gets the government
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off the hook. The government doesn't have to do anything about taxes, about labeling, about restrictions on
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marketing, about restrictions on the content of foods. It can just say it's up to you.
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We think you should eat less sugar and it's up to you to make that happen and we hope that the food companies will go
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along with it. I don't think that's going to work.

Sunita Sohrabji

Right. You've expressed concern that
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people on SNAP benefits and WIC, the women's uh nutrition program, may not
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have access to whole foods because of cost. But isn't it cheaper to eat a
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plant-focused diet rather than one that emphasizes meat and dairy? Say for
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example, the cost of a can of chickpeas and a bunch of kale versus the count cost of a pound of chicken or beef.

Dr. Marian Nestle

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Well, I think there are two issues. Cost, time, and palatability. Uh it's
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perfectly possible to eat absolutely delicious plant-based foods. If you know how to cook, if you have the equipment,
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if you have pots, pans, and knives, if you have a refrigerator, if you have a stove, and ~~the~~ are very, very large
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swaths of the American population that do not in fact have these things. And if
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you are a low-income worker working three jobs to try to earn enough money to feed
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your family, the last thing in the world you want to have to do is to go food
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shopping when there may not be a grocery store anywhere near where you live. You
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may not have transportation. You may not have time to cook and you may not have the um equipment for
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cooking. So, the food industry has moved into that gap by producing very cheap
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products, ultra-processed, and I'll do a quick explanation of what that means. It
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means industrially produced, doesn't look anything like the food that it was
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derived from. You can't make it in your home kitchen because you don't have the equipment or the uh industrial
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additives. And the products were designed to be profitable because they can last long on a shelf and also
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designed to be irresistible if not addictive. The whole purpose of ultra-processed foods is to have products
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that you can't stop eating because the food industry is not a social science
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agency and it's not a public health agency. The food industry is a business. Its job is to make money. That's what
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they're about and produce profits for shareholders. and ultrarocessed foods are extraordinarily profitable. So
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that's what we're dealing with. If you as an individual are going to a grocery store to try to eat healthfully, you are
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fighting the entire food system on your own.

Sunita Sohrabji

Absolutely. So my colleague Peter

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Sherman from ACOM has a related question. Peter, could you please ask your question?

Question from media

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Hi, thank you Sunita. Well, I I have a number of questions, but I I'll try to limit it to to one. I was actually just

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typing in the chat. Um, you know, it people have known about the the negative

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health effects of fast foods for years and years and years. Uh, Superersize Me, the documentary that came out many years

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ago that really showed, I think, in in really stark terms what eating this food

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does to you. And yet, people will defend the right to eat this food. there people that see the these foods as inherent

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inherent parts of of their culture and their traditions. And I guess I'm wondering what what is

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your sense about the most effective way to get this message across around the

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need to rebuild our relationship with real food. Clearly what RFK is doing um

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is trying to get at that. Although the way you're describing it, it's remarkable to hear that this is really about just pawning it off uh on on

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individual responsibility, which we hear was a strategy of the climate of of oil companies as well to push it on on

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people and away from corporations. So I'm curious what you think is the most effective way to sort of to wake to to

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sort of info rm people even people who who maybe aren't able to afford the time

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uh to go shopping to cook things like that. And a related question, I'll keep it very short. Um I was in Honduras a

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few years ago. I was driving through San Pedro Sula and the byline was dotted

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with fast food restaurants. And it just struck me that if archaeologists were to come a thousand years from now, these

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would be the ruins of empire. This is what they would find next to the Mayan temples. They would find the golden arches and the KFC's and
and diabetes is

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surging in Honduras. I'm wondering what you see in terms of these food industries pushing their products abroad

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uh as Americans uh perhaps start to turn away from them the way they did with tobacco. Thank you.

Dr. Marian Nestle

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Well, those are related questions. Um, I'm a public health person, you know, and a public health approach to the

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problem of poor diets is to go what in public health terms is called upstream.

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That is, you look for the basic causes of why people eat the way they do. And

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the people in the United States who eat the health who eat the healthiest diets are people with money and people with

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education. Um, and so if you want to change the population's diet, you provide people

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with enough money to buy healthier foods and with the education

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to go with it. And then you develop um a food system that promotes healthier

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eating. You don't leave it to individuals to have to fight the entire food system on their own. Um but this is

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an exact opposition to what food companies want. Let me just say that

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eating less is very very bad for business. And if you want people to eat

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less and eat less of the wrong kinds of foods or eat less of ultrarocessed foods, you are making a you are making

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efforts that are going to hurt businesses. Businesses don't like that. They're going to lobby. One of the

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questions that was asked was whether the new pyramid was about meat and dairy industry lobbying or whether or it was

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something else. I did a blog post at I write a blog at foodpolitics.com

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and I wrote that I thought uh the meat and dairy industries had a great deal to

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do with the content of this these particular guidelines and pyramid and

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people wrote in and said no no no this is ideology this is the ideology of the secretary of

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health and human services and the ideology of the Trump administration

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um but I think it's a mixture of both. Um, so if you if if your ideology is

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that the is that you don't do anything to hurt industry and we saw this

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recently in the over the issue of glyphosate, which Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said it

33:21

causes cancer just a few months ago. It causes cancer. And now he's saying, "Oh,

33:28

but if we take glyphosate out of the food supply, it will hurt corn and soybean producers."

33:35

So the politics of this is deeply entrenched. We're dealing with

33:41

capitalism with latestage capitalism here in every way in which it works. And

33:47

if you try to change people's diets by educating them that they should eat

33:52

better, that's not going to work. You got to change the system. And how do you change the system? Well,

33:59

I think I've got I've got a long list starting with universal basic income,

34:05

universal school meals, an agriculture system refocused on food for people

34:11

rather than feed for animals and fuel for automobiles. I could go on and on. I

34:18

guess the biggest one is let's overturn the Supreme Court decision in Citizens

34:23

United and get money out of politics. That would help.

Sunita Sohrabji

Yep. Absolutely. Uh Nicole Chang has the

34:31

first question for you. Nicole, please ask your question.

Question from media

34:38

Yes, thank you so much, Sunita. Um um you know there is a lot of good information available but only um only

34:47

is it provided by English or Spanish but you know uh if there are not enough

34:52

resources provided in other languages uh because of the budget being reduced so language accessible is very essential
34:59

for the minority community so I would like to know if there's any plan or
35:05

measures to address or supplement this good question
35:12

uh plan to to expand language access or you know provide or reaching out.

Dr. Marian Nestle

35:18

I have no idea. I'm not re I'm not responsible for the dietary guidelines or the pyramid. I have no idea what
35:25

they're going to do with it.

Sunita Sohrabji

Well, Dr. Nestle opine on that a bit. Do

35:30

you think the language access is necessary?

Dr. Marian Nestle

Of course it is. Okay. Yes.

35:36

I'm happy to say that the first edition of my book, What to Eat, has been translated into Korean. Those of you who
35:44

are from Korea should look for it. It's that I have a copy of it right here.

35:49

Very happy to know that I think everything should be translated into languages. I one of the great um

35:57

sadnesses of my life was that I was not forced to lo learn languages when I was

36:02

young and could do it. Um and I think Americans are very handicapped by not

36:08

speaking a variety of languages. I wish we all did. Uh, and there certainly are

36:14

plenty of people in the United States who don't speak English. Soyas, I think it's enormously important. And I'm

36:20

very proud that I have various of my books have been translated to Chinese

36:26

and Japanese and and Korean and Hebrew and Portuguese, but not Spanish,

36:32

unfortunately.

Sunita Sohrabji

Interesting. Tariq Khan has the next question. Tariq, please ask your

36:39

question.

36:46

Question from media

I I don't know if it's the relevant question with the speaker uh lastly but

36:52

I was just asking uh since we are talking about protein and make protein

36:58

uh you know I mean what are the best proteins we can offer

37:04

to the general public which is affordable and so you know because

37:09

protein is being protein needs to be added in uh everybody's life nowadays

37:16

you know because protein is extremely important no

Dr. Marian Nestle

37:21

can I answer that you know I agree I agree completely with Dr. gardener protein is absolutely not a problem for

37:30

anyone who eats enough calories and gets a variety of food. So in the United

37:35

States protein is a non-issue in other countries where food is much scarcer.

37:42

uh it could be a problem, but the plant-based proteins are healthier. And

37:47

it's been known for decades and decades that if you eat a variety of plant

37:52

sources of protein, you're getting the amino acids that you need and don't need to worry about it. And they don't have

37:59

to be eaten at the same meal. They can be eaten at different meals. Um the major issue in nutrition always is a

38:07

variety of relatively unprocessed foods and that takes care of a lot of nutrition.

38:13

So I'm not aware that protein needs to be added to anything and I think the fact that protein is being added to

38:22

everything is a matter of marketing. It has nothing to do with science.

Sunita Sohrabji

38:27

Interesting. We have a few more questions for you. Nandita Bose will you ask your question?

Question from media

38:36

Yes Sunita. Yes. Yes. Thank you so much. I wanted to ask uh

38:42

Dr. Nestle uh about uh the emphasis on protein. Could it lead to

38:49

um an increase in the um use of protein

38:55

supplements? already there is a trend and um you know I mean a scenario where

39:02

parents could just start adding protein supplements and powders to the diet of

39:08

their children on a regular basis. What could be the repercussions of uh

39:14

the use of excessive use of supplements?

Dr. Marian Nestle

Well, the one thing in favor of of

39:23

addition of protein and this is already happening. I mean, protein is being added to everything in the supermarket.

39:30

Some of the products are really funny. Protein is being put into beer. Protein is being candy. Um, my favorite protein

39:38

product is cookies and cream protein Cheerios. That's that's my favorite

39:45

these days. Um, the one thing about it is it's metabolized. It's very unlikely

39:51

to be harmful. It's wasteful, but it's unlikely to be harmful. Um, I haven't

39:58

seen much convincing evidence of harm, except for the protein powders that have

40:05

heavy metals in them. And when the protein powders are examined, they're

40:11

found to have arsenic um and too much of toxic metals in them.

40:17

So, I'm not in favor of protein supplements. I think they're a very bad

40:23

idea. Um but if people are using them, they're mostly unlikely to be harmful.

Sunita Sohrabji

40:31

Interesting. N Dr. Nestle, stick around, please, for a final round of questions.

40:36

Sure. if you all right thank you so much our final speaker today is Dr. Sish

40:42

Ralph the founder of climate healers Dr. Ralph will discuss the environmental

40:48

impacts of greater meat and dairy consumption by Americans and factory

40:53

farming welcome Dr. row.

Dr. Sailesh Rao

Well, thank you, Sita. Um, I have

40:59

prepared some remarks. I'm going to read that to you. Yes. Um, so I'm going to speak about uh how

41:05

the 2025 dietary guidelines for Americans impacts us from an environmental perspective.

41:12

But more than that, I want to talk to you about what these guidelines reveal about the choices facing humanity right

41:19

now. a choice between what we call planet A and planet B.

41:25

Most people think the dietary guidelines are about health. They're jointly issued by the USDA and the Department of Health

41:32

and Human Services. So surely health is the priority, right?

41:38

Americans are critically deficient in fiber, an essential macronutrient.

41:43

The USDA has admitted that 95% of Americans don't get enough fiber. So you

41:48

would think that the guidelines would address this glaring deficiency, right? You'd be wrong on both counts.

41:56

What I want to show you is that these guidelines exemplify a system called planet A, our current operating system

42:03

that's driving what I call the poly crisis, which is 26 tightly interwoven

42:10

existential threats, including planetary overheating, mass extinction, chronic

42:16

disease epidemics, freshwater depletion, world hunger, and rising inequality.

42:22

These are not separate problems. They are one interconnected emergency and the

42:27

dietary guidelines actively make it worse. Here is the problem. While HHS may

42:35

co-issue these guidelines, the process is dominated by commercial interests.

42:41

Advisory committee members have documented ties to meat, dairy and pharmaceutical industries.

42:48

research considered is industry funded and critically environmental impact the

42:54

single most important factor determining whether our children inherit a habitable planet is deliberately excluded from

43:02

consideration. Now when 330 million Americans follow these guidelines the environmental

43:08

consequences would be huge. The 2025 pyramid recommends dairy every

43:14

single day. Producing one gallon of milk requires 1,000 gallons of water.

43:22

Think about that. While the Colorado River fails to reach the ocean and the Ogallala aquifer depletes.

43:30

But water is just the tip of the iceberg. Dairy production uses vast land growing

43:37

alfalfa and corn to feed cows who convert 10 calories of plant food into one

43:44

calorie of milk. This is catastrophic inefficiency treated as normal. Planet A

43:50

in action that land use drives deforestation globally.

43:57

Forests that took thousands of years to develop, storing carbon, filtering water, housing countless species are

44:05

cleared to grow feed for animals Americans are told they need to eat daily.
44:11

The guidelines recommend meat without honestly comparing it to plant foods.
44:17

Environmentally, there is no comparison. Beef generates 60 pounds of greenhouse
44:23

gas emissions per pound. Lentils less than one pound.
44:30

That's not incremental difference. That's the gap between planet A and planet B.
44:36

Chicken promoter is better. Still requires 10 times more land than plants
44:41

for the same calories. Poultry operations pollute waterways, creating dead zones in rivers and
44:48

coastal areas. Here's what the guidelines won't tell you. We don't need any animal products
44:55

for health. The academy of nutrition and dietetics states clearly that wellplanned vegan
45:01

diets are healthy for all life stages including pregnancy, infancy, childhood,
45:08

and athletic performance. The Eat Lancet Commission, the most comprehensive scientific review of diet
45:15

and sustainability ever conducted, concluded that planetary health diet, is
45:20

primarily plant-based with minimal or zero animal products. So why do the 2025
45:26

guidelines push animal products while excluding environmental science?
45:33

Follow the money. This is planet A with systems designed to maximize extraction
45:39

and profit regardless of consequences. But there is a planet B. The alternative
45:47

operating system framework we are building using systems aligned with ecological
45:53

reality designed for regeneration rather than extraction.
45:58

If Americans followed plant-based dietary guidelines like the one proposed by the Physicians Committee for
46:04

Responsible Medicine and Dr. Michael Greger's Daily Dozen, we'd free up 300
46:11

million acres of agricultural land in the US alone, larger than California and
46:16

Texas combined. That land could be rewilded, returning to
46:22

forest, prairie, wetland. Those ecosystems would sequester carbon,
46:28

rebuild soil, restore water cycles, and provide habitat for wildlife being
46:33

driven to extinction. Agriculture would become planet healing, not planet destroying.
46:40

We'd reduce water consumption by 70% We'd eliminate agricultural antibiotic
46:46

use, the leading cause of antibiotic resistance. We prevent millions of
46:51

chronic disease deaths in coming decades. We eliminate America's single largest
46:58

nutritional deficiency, lack of fiber. This is planet B. The solution is
47:04

simple. Beans, lentils, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds. These
47:11

foods are cheaper, healthier, and cause a fraction of the environmental impact.
47:17

They are in grocery stores. They are part of cuisines from every culture.

47:22

We don't need new technology or billion dollar investments. We need honest guidelines telling Americans the truth.

47:30

We don't need dairy for calcium. You don't need meat for protein. You don't need fish for omega-3s. You can get all

47:37

of these nutrients from plants while shrinking your environmental footprint enormously.

47:43

But Planet A won't surrender easily. The 2025 guidelines aren't honest nutrition

47:50

advice. They're designed to maintain markets for products we don't need that

47:55

harm our health and destroy our only planet. This is the choice we face. Planet A

48:02

driving the poly crisis towards planetary destruction or planet B a framework for the poly solution that

48:09

allows life to thrive. The dietary guidelines are a microcosm of this choice. They could guide

48:16

Americans towards health and planetary healing. Instead, they guide us deeper into crisis.

48:23

We are at a decision point. What we do now determines whether our children

48:28

inherit a habitable world or a runaway ecological catastrophe.

48:34

Every meal is a choice between planet A and planet B. Every policy is that choice. Every

48:41

investment, every vote, every action. This poly crisis is an emergency.

48:47

But the poly solution exists. Planet B is a practical framework grounded in science with every element proven

48:55

feasible. We can do better. We must do better. Our future, our children's future and all

49:02

life on earth depends upon it. The question is will we choose transformation while there is still

49:08

time? Thank you

Sunita Sohrabji

49:16

Dr. Rod. Thank you for your excellent remarks. Um I want to take uh the first

49:21

I want to ask the first question. Do we face some of the same ethical conundrums

49:27

with plantbased products? How much water for example would we need for a gallon

49:33

of almond milk versus a pound of beef? Right?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

I mean a gallon of almond I mean

49:40

almond milk almonds uh require water if you grow them as monocultures

49:46

right but if you grow almond trees as part of an agroforestry

49:51

almond trees turn out to be one of the best ways of filtering water basically taking water from underground and

49:58

transpiring it through the leaves. So we'll be thanking the almond tree for doing that and creating clouds above the

50:04

forest. Instead, when we grow them as monocultures, of course, you're going to have to pour a lot of water to make them

50:11

grow. And that's why the almond milk footprint looks like it has a a big

50:17

water footprint, but even that is not as much as dairy milk. Interesting.

Sunita Sohrabji

So, um, you're a vegan.

50:25

I've read some of your terrific recipes on your blog. Um could you give us an example of your typical day's menu and

50:32

inspire us to uh eat like you do and and tell us what are your cheats as well?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

50:39

Yeah. So I try to follow uh Dr. Michael Greger's daily dozen. And it's not that

50:44

you have to follow it every day, but over time, if you average out to, you

50:50

know, the servings of grains, servings of nuts and seeds and berries and

50:55

mushrooms that he recommends, and greens, of course, um you'll work out, you know, it'll work out great. Your

51:02

health will be amazing. You won't put on extra weight and and you will have a

51:08

great life. That's what I do.

Sunita Sohrabji

And your cheats?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

51:14

My cheats. I do take a supplement from the vegan society called Veg One

51:21

and that has vitamin D and uh vitamin B12. So that's what I take every day as

51:28

a supplement.

Sunita Sohrabji

All right, Rebecca Barts has the first question for you. Rebecca, please ask

51:35

your question.

Question from media

Thank you so much. I'm wondering do you think meaningful climate actions require

51:42

changing the US food system and if so what are proper measures?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

51:47

Yeah, the meaningful climate action absolutely requires uh changing the food system worldwide, not just in the US. Uh

51:55

because it turns out that when we burn fossil fuels, not only are we emitting

52:01

warming gases like carbon dioxide and methane, we also emit cooling gases like

52:07

sulfur dioxide. And those cooling gases only stay in the atmosphere for a few

52:12

weeks. And they're actually masking most of the warming that fossil fuels have done so

52:18

far. Which means that the warming that we are experiencing today is mainly

52:23

caused by animal agriculture. not caused by fossil fuels at the moment. So the right way to address

52:30

climate action is to change the food system as quickly as possible and

52:35

restore the forest and as we restore the forest we can dial down the fossil fuel use. So I see this as you know you have

52:43

to press the clutch first and then change the gear in the car. You cannot do it the other way around. So, uh, I

52:51

encourage people to, um, to change the fossil fuel infrastructure over to, um,

52:57

clean energy sources, but for heaven's sake, go vegan first.

Sunita Sohrabji

53:04

Henrietta Burroughs has a question for you. Henrietta, please ask your question.

Question from media

53:12

Thanks, Sunita. Dr. Raal, I'm sure you don't eat eggs. However, eggs are

53:18

considered the perfect food. So, should we completely abandon them from our diets?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

53:24

Well, uh, who said it's the perfect food? It's probably the egg industry.

53:31

The egg industry. Correct. Yeah. Um the USDA has actually it's uh

53:40

rated eggs as the number two source of dioxin in American diets

53:46

second only to fish and dioxins are some of the strongest carcinogens known to man and we emit a lot of dioxin in our

53:53

industrial processes. So I don't think they're a perfect food.

Question from media

54:00

Okay. And um uh would flax seed be a substitute for

54:07

eggs?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

Yes, absolutely. Yeah. So flax seeds and chia seeds and these are substitutes for

54:15

for eggs in terms of baking and even applesauce will do the job for you

54:20

for baking.

Sunita Sohrabji

Uh Nefasel Ahmed has a question. Nefo,

54:27

please ask your question.

54:35

I can ask it for him if he's unable to mute. How can schools promote diets that

54:40

are both healthy and environmentally friendly? Um, and I wanted to ask you, Dr. Ralph, you know, in India, school

54:48

nutrition, uh, school lunches look like lentils with rice, some vegetables, and

54:54

maybe a sweet dish. Um, is that a model that's replicable in the United States?

Dr. Sailesh Rao

55:01

Yeah, I'm I absolutely love the the midday meals that they serve in schools

55:06

in India. You know, basically they serve a form of what we call kiti. Yes. Mix of lentils and rice and vegetables

55:13

and spices and the children love it because they keep coming back for seconds. You know, when you So, it proves that

55:20

when you uh offer tasty food, the kids will eat it. they'll come back for more.

55:26

Now, is that replicable in the US? And you can do a culturally appropriate

55:32

version of the same thing. You know, I call it unities too or, you know, something like that. But, uh, we can

55:39

actually offer, you know, gourmet vegan meals and it won't be that expensive

55:45

when we do it in bulk, right? with uh um you know nicely

55:51

presented and having all of the ingredients that they need for a healthy diet. I really think that nutrition the

55:59

the purpose of the food system should be to nourish people. Today the purpose of the food system is

56:06

not to nourish people. It's to make money for someone and that's the problem we are facing.

Sunita Sohrabji

56:12

Peter Sherman has a question for you. Peter,

Question from media

56:19

thank uh thank you Sunita. Um I'd actually like to um switch my question

56:25

if that's okay and and just to say um listening to you um I um Mr. Ra I I feel

56:32

inclined now to return to my vegan days of many years ago. So thank you for for

56:38

such an eloquent and compelling presentation. I worked for a sustainable development company for several

56:44

organization for several years working in countries like Brazil, Peru, Colombia. One thing, one of the law uh

56:50

takeaways from that was that uh in the Amazon where deforestation driven by beef production is is really rampant.

56:57

Poverty was the crux of the issue. It was much easier for a poor person living in the Amazon to buy a cow and and clear

57:05

some land. The trees were valueless. So, a lot of our work was focused on bringing value to trees

57:11

through things like, I hate to say it, like carbon offsets and that sort of thing. So, I'm just curious. I mean,

57:18

your your presentation is compelling and powerful. I don't know how applicable it

57:24

can be in in regions where poverty is rampant and where sometimes the only option is to invest in in cattle.

Dr. Sailesh Rao

57:32

No, I I hear you. uh I call this a systems transformation that needs to happen you know because we have built

57:39

all of our systems uh around profit making and extraction and so long as

57:46

that's how we are designing all our systems you're going to get the results that you're getting and this is why uh

57:52

we have to look at this as a systems transformation. How do you because a system is based on what is its objective

57:58

function? What is it designed to do? And so we have to create food systems that's that's about nourishing people. You have

58:05

to create energy systems that's about providing energy to people. So transportation system that's objective

58:10

function is to transport people. So profit should not be the main motive.

58:16

You know a little bit of profit is necessary to make it sustainable. But other than that it should not be the

58:21

main motive and we have to have true cost accounting for everything that we do and this is when you will be in

58:28

alignment with with reality. So I I'm calling for a complete system transformation and you know it's no

58:35

one's fault that the things are the way they are today. They are the way they are because they evolved into this this

58:43

predicament that we are in. But once you realize that we are in this predicament, we have to look at it from as a how do

58:50

you solve the problem from a an honest engineering perspective

58:56

and and deal with it properly.

Sunita Sohrabji

59:02

Dr. Nestle and Dr. Ralph, you've given us so much um incredible information.

59:07

I'd like to ask each of you for your 30 second sound bite. What are the most

59:12

important takeaways you would like to leave reporters with? Let's start with you, Dr. Nestle.

59:25

Oh, Dr. Nestle had to leave. So, Dr. Ralph, leave us with your uh most

59:31

important sound bite.

Dr. Sailesh Rao

Yeah. Well, I'm I am uh grateful to you

59:37

for giving me this forum to speak to all of you and uh so we know that uh we have

59:44

a we we have a big fight ahead of us in terms of um how do we get this into the

59:52

minds of people? How do we get people to understand that we have to have a system transformation and um

1:00:00

just like what is happening you know in the real world there is this is a David

1:00:06

versus Goliath type of battle and but fortunately through community media we

1:00:13

can get the word out to the grassroots you know this is why I I find what

1:00:19

you're doing to be extremely inspiring and thank you so

Sunita Sohrabji

Thank you, Dr. Ralph. and thank you to all