

How CSPI Undermines Science, Nutrition, and U.S. Dietary Guidelines



By Alex Berezow — December 6, 2016



Not a depiction of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. (Credit: Shutterstock) [1]

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines were born of good intentions. They were created to make Americans healthier.

The guidelines, however, were not inscribed on stone tablets and handed to mankind. Instead, they are the result of a bureaucratic process and, as such, are susceptible to dubious conclusions and adverse influence by activist groups.

In 2015, journalist Nina Teicholz conducted an investigation, published in *BMJ* [2], that criticized the dietary guidelines for being based on "weak scientific standards" and "vulnerable to internal bias as well as outside agendas."

For instance, the guidelines recommend against saturated fat, which is commonly believed to cause cardiovascular disease. But this widespread notion is based on outdated information; the best and most recent studies show no link. The committee that offered the dietary guidelines, however, ignored them.

Ms. Teicholz claims that the committee is biased toward promoting low-meat, plant-based diets that are largely unsupported by scientific evidence. The dietary committee appears to cherry-pick the research it likes and to ignore the rest. That's hardly an evidence-based recipe. Indeed, Ms. Teicholz writes:

The omissions seem to suggest a reluctance by the committee behind the report to consider any evidence that contradicts the last 35 years of nutritional advice.

Ms. Teicholz is not the only person to strongly criticize the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. In a damning article for [RealClearScience](#) [3], obesity researcher Edward Archer concluded that the guidelines are a "fraud" predicated upon "a vast collection of nearly baseless anecdotes."

How have food activists responded to these criticisms? As usual, instead of engaging critics with data, they simply tried to shut them down. The inaptly named Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) [advocated](#) [4] for the retraction of Ms. Teicholz's report. Though there were some factual errors that *BMJ* subsequently [corrected](#) [5], the journal [replied](#) [6], "Independent experts find no grounds for retraction." Going further, the *BMJ* even endorsed the findings and conclusions of Ms. Teicholz's article.

Issue settled, right? Wrong. CSPI fired off a [press release](#) [7] claiming that *BMJ* has "stain[ed] its reputation."

Nonsense. A biomedical journal does not retract a paper simply because it made a vocal group of activists upset. The *BMJ* is a reputable journal that published an article that passed peer review. In response to criticism, the journal scrutinized the article a second time. Thus, after two independent peer reviews, the journal concluded that the article stood on its own merit.

Instead of accepting their evidence-based conclusion, CSPI is doubling down. Instead of applauding *BMJ*'s efforts, CSPI is undermining peer review. And instead of relying on timely and accurate research that truly would serve the public interest, CSPI ironically embraces obsolete information.

Perhaps CSPI -- which wants [cancer warning labels on bacon](#) [8] -- has one of those "outside agendas" that *BMJ* warned about.

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[2] <http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4962>

[3]

http://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2016/03/02/the_us_dietary_guidelines_a_scientific_fraud_109552.html

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[5] <http://www.bmj.com/content/355/bmj.i6061>

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