

Has the DGAC bitten off more than it can chew?

By ACSH Staff — February 20, 2015



This week the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee

(DGAC) released its [report](#) ^[1] on how Americans should eat something that such committees have been doing every five years since 1980. But this time the DGAC seems to have gone way beyond its basic charge.

In addition to delineating which foods and ingredients Americans are advised to consume, based on data reviewed by the committee, they also inspected data on which dietary patterns are associated with health benefits. Thus, they noted that diets higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, seafood, legumes, and nuts; moderate in alcohol (among adults); lower in red and processed meat; and low in sugar-sweetened foods and drinks and refined grains are associated with better health. Although one might argue with some of these recommendations, they are certainly within the DGAC's purview.

They then took their recommendations a step further by considering such parameters as the Food Environment and Settings, Food Sustainability, as well as recommendations on promoting behavioral changes and influencing food environments and settings.

One might well ask why such topics are included in guidance supposedly directed at individual Americans? One major concern is that these recommendations, once approved, will also be used as the basis for school lunches and other government programs. Critics have asked, do schools really have to consider sustainability when deciding what to feed students? Will they also be told to consider climate change?

In fact, according to an article in the [Wall Street Journal](#) ^[2], the committee did recommend that a product's environmental footprint should be disclosed on food or menu labels.

Further, although some recommendations, such as lower sodium consumption and the deleterious effects of dietary saturated fats have been challenged in the scientific literature, these disputes don't seem to have been considered. 2300 milligrams of sodium are still being promoted by the DGAC.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava commented. Obviously, the eating environment and motivation for dietary changes are important topics when considering the population's food consumption patterns. However, it seems out of place to include them and topics such as sustainability in what are still called *Dietary* guidelines.

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[1] <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015-scientific-report/02-executive-summary.asp>

[2] <http://www.wsj.com/articles/diet-experts-push-more-plants-less-meat-in-nod-to-environment-1424368897>