



# Potato Monthly: February 2021



## Food and Nutrition Policy

### **FDA Regulatory Updates**

Multiple Trump Administration rules and guidances that were pending review by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) were withdrawn following the inauguration. This includes FDA's Proposed Rule updating the definition of "Healthy" for food labeling claims. We expect this proposal to be reviewed by the new Administration to decide if they would like to resubmit to OMB for review and then official publication. Similarly, a draft guidance document regarding FDA's Cannabidiol (CBD) enforcement policy was also withdrawn. In early January, the FDA re-iterated concerns that significant data gaps exist as to the safety and long-term effects of CBD in food and supplements. FDA intends to develop research plans to address these existing gaps.

### **Biden Administration Food Assistance Plans**

In early January, the Biden Administration released a proposal outlining their goals for the next COVID relief bill. Among the plan's many proposals includes multiple calls on Congress to help provide more Americans with healthy, affordable food. For example, the plan proposes to extend the 15% Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit increase as well as invest \$3 billion in the WIC program.

In response to an Executive Order (EO) signed in President Biden's first days, the USDA has already increased pandemic-EBT by 15% and the Department is separately looking at ways to increase SNAP benefits for all participants. The USDA also recently announced that they plan to begin the process of revising the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) to better reflect the cost of a basic healthy diet today. The TFP is used to determine SNAP benefit allotment. In addition to this progress, President Biden continues to call on Congress to extend the SNAP benefit increases past June and invest more in WIC.

### **Child Nutrition Reauthorization Update**

In a recent briefing, incoming Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) indicated that her future priorities include COVID-19 relief, climate change, and nutrition. As part of this, Stabenow noted that she wants to pass a bill to reauthorize the child nutrition programs. Those programs – including WIC and school meals – are operating through appropriations bills, but they have not been reauthorized since the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act.

### **USDA Staff Update**

The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry voted to advance the nomination of Tom Vilsack for Secretary of Agriculture. During the hearing, Vilsack laid out his priorities including COVID-19 response, hunger relief, social justice, and climate change. Vilsack's nomination will now be considered by the full Senate, and he is expected to have a swift, full Senate confirmation.

### **SNAP Spending in 2020**

According to new data from the USDA, federal spending on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased by nearly 50% over the last year during the pandemic. During 2020, the program cost nearly \$90 billion, a large increase from the \$60 billion spent in fiscal year 2019. The increase was largely due to two main factors, including an additional 9 million Americans receiving the benefits as well as an emergency increase in benefit allotment in response to school and business closures.



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## Nutrition Science

### Heavy Metals Found in Baby Food

The House Oversight Committee's subcommittee on economic and consumer policy reported findings of heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury in baby foods made by various manufacturers. The metals were found in items such as rice cereals, sweet potato puree, juices, and sweet snack puffs. Among the list were also four dehydrated potato products that exceeded certain amounts of cadmium. As a result of these findings, the Congressional committee has called for stricter regulation, mandatory labeling, and testing of baby food from the FDA.

### Veggies Early & Often Campaign

Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) announced a new campaign, "Veggies Early and Often." The campaign aims to transform the food landscape for infants and young children by offering consumers a new, reliable indicator that products marketed as having vegetables actually have vegetables in significant amounts and calling on brands to prioritize a veggie-forward approach. The indicator that PHA created is an icon that companies can use on their packaging if products meet PHA's Veggies Early & Often nutritional criteria, which are based on the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. PHA hopes companies will use these standards to reformulate existing commercial baby food products or create new veggie-forward baby and toddler food products.

### NIH Study Compares Low-Fat, Plant-Based Diet to Low-Carb, Animal-Based Diet

A new study highlights that carbohydrates may not be the macronutrient to pinpoint for insulin resistance and impaired glucose tolerance. The study, published in *Nature Medicine*, set out to compare the effects of a low-fat vs. a low-carb diet on calorie intake, hormone levels, body weight and more. Results showed the low-fat (higher carb) diet led to significant loss of body fat **and** those that followed the low-fat diet became significantly less glucose intolerant (15% for low-fat vs 45% for low-carb) – a finding that directly counters many misbeliefs about carbohydrates' impact on glucose control. Overall, these findings suggest that the factors that result in overeating and weight gain are far more complex than the amount of carbs or fat in one's diet.

### Potatoes Featured in Top-Ranking Med Diet

All eyes are on the Mediterranean Diet ("Med Diet"), which was recently ranked "best diet overall" by U.S. News & World Report for the fourth year in a row and features potatoes as part of a healthful, balanced plate. Leveraging the Med Diet's high praise, Potatoes USA partner Deanna Segrave-Daly, RD, contributed to a *Parade* article sharing snack inspiration for those following the Mediterranean Diet. The article highlights potatoes as a nutrient-dense ingredient option saying, "potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin C and also provide potassium, protein and fiber" and that they make for a filling and nutrient-dense snack. Segrave-Daly offers this snack idea: "Rub a russet potato with olive oil and prick several times with a fork. Microwave for about 8 minutes, flipping halfway. Split open and top with feta and roasted red peppers."