

Potato Industry | March 2022

Food & Nutrition Policy

Omnibus Spending Bill Includes Funding for White House Conference for Food and Nutrition

Funding for the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger and Health was included in the Omnibus spending bill that passed in the House and Senate this week. This funding includes \$2.5 million for a cross-government project involving the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), USDA, various other federal agencies, and state and local players to address anti-hunger and nutrition issues. Within 120 days from the bill's passage, HHS is directed to produce a report including findings and proposed solutions to end hunger and improve nutrition security in the United States by 2030. We anticipate this platform will be used to make announcements by private companies and trade associations around commitments in this space as well as report which policy recommendations the government should implement over the next decade.

Califf Confirmed as FDA Commissioner

In February, Dr. Robert Califf was confirmed as FDA Commissioner with a vote of 50-46 in the Senate. Dr. Califf previously served as commissioner during the last year of the Obama administration and will be the first permanent chief for the FDA in more than a year. During Califf's last tenure, he mainly focused on the medical side of the FDA, however, he noted in a recent Senate hearing that he would give more attention to the food side of the FDA this time around.

USDA Issues Final Rule to Update Child Nutrition Programs

The USDA announced their final rule on Child Nutrition Programs: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium, which provides clarity around nutrition standards for school meals programs. Starting September 2022, the rule will allow schools to serve flavored low-fat (1%) milk and will also require at least 80% of grain-based foods like bread and cereal to be at least 50% whole grain. The rule also establishes a 10% decrease in the maximum sodium limit starting in fall 2023 while maintaining current sodium limits for School Year 2022-2023. Stakeholders can submit written comments until March 24, 2022. This fall, the USDA also intends to issue a new proposed rule that will further update all nutrition standards for school meals based on recommendations from the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Legislators Urge USDA to Revise WIC Food Packages

A group of Senators and House legislators signed a letter to urge USDA to issue revised WIC food packages under the anticipated proposed rule, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children: Revisions in the WIC Food Packages. In the letter, legislators urged that the proposal include increased fruit and vegetable benefits, increased lower-mercury seafood options, additional package size options, an additional substitution pattern, the option for parents to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in place of jarred infant foods to promote greater choice for parents, and stronger standards for whole grains, sugar content, calcium, and protein.

Study Suggests Delay on Finalizing Sodium Targets Costs Lives

A study published in the journal *Hypertension* suggests that the FDA's delay in finalizing voluntary sodium reduction goals for the food industry may have cost more than 250,000 lives. Researchers used modeling to determine that the FDA's new finalized sodium targets could save up to 445,979 lives over a decade. They projected that the delay in finalizing those targets could have led to as many as 266,644 unnecessary deaths. In October, the FDA finalized short-term voluntary reduction targets five years after first proposing both short- and long-term goals during the Obama administration.

USDA Invests \$1 Billion in Climate Smart Commodities

The USDA is investing \$1 billion in partnerships to support climate-smart farmers through the [Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities](#). This program will finance pilot projects to create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include innovative, cost-effective ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits, nutrient management, planting for high carbon sequestration rates and more. USDA is now accepting project applications for fiscal year 2022. The results from these pilot projects will be used to inform climate programs in the 2023 farm bill.

Codex to Host Meeting on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

The U.S. Codex Office is sponsoring a [public meeting](#) on March 24, 2022, to provide information and receive public comments on agenda items and draft U.S. positions to be discussed at the 22nd Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. This meeting will convene virtually April 25-May 4, 2022.

China Requires More Commodities to Have Facility Registration

China's Customs agency [added](#) several hundred commodity categories to the list of agricultural products whose production facilities must be registered to export the products to China. The list has expanded to include frozen potatoes and potato products among other commodities. China implemented new facility registration requirements for food products exported to China beginning this year. U.S. firms that export to China can register directly with the Chinese customs agency.

USDA National Organic Program to Hold Virtual Public Listening Session

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) [scheduled](#) a virtual public meeting for March 21, 2022, with a request for comment that covers the feedback on specific recommendations from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). AMS intends to use the information received from public comments to prioritize future rulemaking and standards development activities.

Nutrition Science and Communication Reports

French Fry Potato Consumption and Energy Balance: A Randomized Controlled Trial

White potatoes — especially French fries — are often singled out in nutrition research and dietary guidance due to their association with obesity and increased chronic disease risk, despite limited scientific evidence supporting such links. Now, a [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* demonstrates that adding a 300-calorie snack of French fries or almonds to one's typical diet every day for a month does *not* result in weight gain or other biomarker changes associated with type 2 diabetes. Changes in body fat mass, body weight, fasting blood sugar and fasting insulin levels at the end of the one-month trial were comparable across the French fry and almond test diets and were not clinically significant. The findings reinforce that health outcomes result from one's total diet and overall balance of calories rather than any one food in isolation.

Potatoes and Heart Health

Potatoes USA promoted a release for American Heart Month 2022 touting how potatoes can be part of a heart-healthy diet. This year, the CDC spotlighted high blood pressure as a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. A [study](#) published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found that adding 1,600 mg of potassium a day can lower stroke risk by 21%. A single serving of potatoes has 620 mg of potassium, which is [more than a medium-sized banana](#)! In fact, skin-on potatoes rank highest for potassium content among the 20 top-selling fruits and vegetables. The release was picked up by [Yahoo](#) and over 180 other outlets.

Research Identifies “Loose Produce” as Food Waste Solution

A new research [report](#) that examined the link between food waste in the home and use of plastic packaging found that selling produce loose and removing best before dates resulted in a combined saving of 100,000 tons of food waste. They found that bananas, broccoli, cucumbers, and potatoes were less likely to be thrown out if they were sold loose.

Study Calls for More Research on Ultra Processed Classification Systems

A [research study](#) published in *Nature* reviewed the different classification systems for processed foods and suggested areas for further research as the type of food processing becomes more prevalent in nutrition discussions. Researchers concluded that the NOVA recommendation that highly processed foods (HPFs) be avoided is a challenging recommendation since almost two-thirds of all energy globally comes from HPFs.