Dear Secretary Azar and Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your leadership on ensuring that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) review all scientific and evidence-based recommendations for the upcoming 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). The DGA plays a critical role in shaping policy for public health, nutrition, agriculture, and food and beverage stakeholders. As you consider recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, we are writing to request that HHS and USDA strongly consider adding a water section to the DGA, and subsequently, add a water icon to the MyPlate nutritional graphic.

The DGA provides an invaluable resource for professionals, educators, and anyone who seeks a fuller understanding of a balanced diet. However, what most Americans know about the Dietary Guidelines they learn from the MyPlate graphic. The MyPlate graphic is the primary tool used to educate Americans about nutrition and is based on the DGA. Posters of MyPlate are found all across our nation’s school cafeterias, and the MyPlate graphic is used by SNAP-Ed and Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program educators. The current MyPlate graphic includes dairy (and that should continue), but it does not include water. Adding a water symbol to MyPlate puts a spotlight on the importance of drinking water and would be a key strategy in helping Americans to consider healthy beverage options, improve nutrition, and positively affect their overall health.

Water — whether tap, bottled, or filtered — is essential to life and plays a critical role in a healthy lifestyle. In addition to making healthier choices, including the water symbol may also reduce dehydration and the health effects associated with it including: adverse cognitive and digestive functions, reduced muscle performance, weakened immunity, and fatigue.1,2,3 America’s seniors are among the most vulnerable to dehydration due primarily to a decrease in thirst as well as an increased prevalence of chronic diseases and the use of multiple medications.4

Because the 2020 Dietary Guidelines will also focus for the first time on children from birth to 24 months, it is important to consider that the development of healthy behaviors, including healthy hydration, starts at an early age. Such actions may influence the development of a chronic disease or not. Breast milk or infant formula along with the introduction of water for children between 6 and 12 months old is consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health professionals. In addition, a recent report provided the first national recommendations from reputable nutrition organizations highlighting the importance of drinking water from a young age. The report recommends children between 6 and 12 months can begin drinking water once solid foods are introduced, and that children ages 12 to 24 months of age should primarily drink water and milk.

Including water on nutrition educational tools is practiced by governments around the world. Currently, at least 48 countries promote water consumption in their nutrition guidance graphics. However, the United States lags behind in this regard as water is noticeably absent on the most prominent educational tool that the government uses to promote a healthy diet – the MyPlate nutritional graphic.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of our recommendation. As water is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle, we urge the USDA and HHS to take the necessary steps to add a symbol of water, alongside the current dairy symbol, to the MyPlate nutritional graphic. We believe adding the water symbol is consistent with recommendations from all relevant stakeholders and recommendations from your various agencies. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Roger Marshall, M.D.
Member of Congress

Jackie Walorski
Member of Congress

David P. Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

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