NORTH AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE

An Open Letter to the Nutrition Research Community and to Journal Editors About Prompt and Complete Publication of Findings

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Dear Nutrition Researchers and Journal Editors:

News last week that a National Institutes of Health (NIH) research team has done a comprehensive analysis of data from the Minnesota Coronary Experiment (MCE), 1968-73, more than 40 years after it was collected, is gratifying, because it finally makes public critical information about saturated fat, but troubling in its tardiness.

The new analysis reveals that data from a massive study found that saturated fat was not associated with death from coronary heart disease. Ivan Frantz, Ph.D., the original researcher, published some of it in 1989, 16 years after the project's completion and after he had retired because, "We just didn't like the way it came out." (Teicholz, 2014) His comment and reticence to publish reflect the fact that the findings contradicted the existing scientific dogma: that a low fat diet would prevent heart disease.

This news is similar to the handling of a massive Harvard Pooling Project study of 725,000 people. Those findings, presented as an abstract at a 2004 American Association for Cancer Research conference, found that red and processed meats were not associated with colon cancer. Twelve years later, the final paper has never appeared despite the fact that the study was funded by the federal government. Is it possible there are other studies like these two examples that would contribute to our understanding of nutrition?

Our nation's nutrition policy should not be built on just half the story, but that is what happens when researchers may only have been able to publish papers that found linkages between foods and health outcomes, rather than those that found nothing. Concerns about how to publish data that challenges certain scientific dogmas or how to overcome journal editors' unwillingness to publish null or negative findings is not new and has becoming an increasingly frequent topic of conversation in the scientific community. Stanford researchers documented this failure to publish in the social sciences in a 2014 paper and argued that not only does failure to publish create an incomplete picture, it fails to prevent other researchers from wasting time and money pursuing hypotheses that have been disproven.

In December 2015, David B. Resnik, J.D., Ph.D., Bioethicist and National Institute of Environmental Sciences Internal Review Board Chair, outlined appropriate research ethics and among them was the following: "1) Openness: Share data, results, ideas, tools, resources. Be open to criticism and new ideas; and 2) Responsible Publication: Publish in order to advance research and scholarship, not to advance just your own career. Avoid wasteful and duplicative publication." We couldn't agree more. It's time to shine a light on nutrition research – the good, the bad, the positive, and the negative. Public health is at stake and nothing less should be tolerated.

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