
April 15, 2016

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Burwell and Secretary Vilsack

Like so many who read the *Washington Post* this week, I was disappointed to see that another important, federally-funded nutrition research project apparently was never fully analyzed and published.

“Reevaluation of the traditional diet-heart hypothesis: analysis of recovered data from Minnesota Coronary Experiment” in the latest *British Medical Journal* analyzes data from subgroups in a study documented between 1968 and 1973. The researcher responsible for the original data collection, Dr. Ivan Frantz, published some of the data in 1989 – after he retired – because, “We just didn’t like the way it came out.” (Teicholz, 2014) That’s probably because the findings did not confirm or conform to the current scientific dogma: that saturated fat caused coronary heart disease. Now, researchers, including Frantz’s son, have analyzed comprehensively the data from the study, which was housed in Dr. Frantz’s basement, and that analysis raises more questions about the saturated fat-heart disease link.

Withholding much of these results until 1989, coupled with the fact that all the data was not fully analyzed and published until 2016, has done a disservice to the scientific literature generally and to nutrition policy specifically. Since the Dietary Guidelines were first published in 1980, nutrition scientists and national policymakers began pressing for a low-fat and low cholesterol diet, yet the incidences of diseases such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes have increased. Policymakers and scientists must stop ignoring, or hiding, the science because they do not “like” the results of a particular project. Nutrition and health challenges must be addressed with open minds and transparency, and those who fund these projects must insist on prompt publication of research generated by the projects they fund.

Secretary Burwell and Secretary Vilsack

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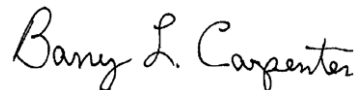
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This week's news is reminiscent of another federally-funded research project that also has not published 12 years after it was presented at conference in abbreviated abstract form. One of the largest studies ever done on red meat and colon cancer – [a National Institutes of Health-funded 2004 Harvard School of Public Health analysis](#) involving more than 725,000 men and women and presented at the 2004 American Association for Cancer Research Conference - showed no relationship between red and processed meat and colon cancer. When questioned about it by a journalist in 2007, one of the lead authors indicated they were still collecting data. When asked about the study this week, the lead author stated the full paper does not exist “because it involves a lot of effort from many studies and didn't work out to create a full paper.” Because the study's findings exist only in abstract form, groups such as the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the World Cancer Research Fund do not consider its important findings when evaluating a link between diet and cancer.

This is not a new concern among the scientific community. Stanford researchers documented this failure to publish in a 2014 paper. They 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.” These ethics, along with the [Increasing Access to the Results of Federally Funded Research policy memorandum](#) issued in 2013, are important steps in the right direction. That document requires timely and full publication of federally funded research and the Meat Institute encourages you to actively enforce the policy. Failure to complete and provide policymakers the opportunity to consider the results of the Minnesota Coronary Experiment, the Harvard Pooling Project, and possibly others, adversely affects the ability of key decision-makers to craft sound national nutrition and health policy.

The United States has important public health issues to address and it cannot afford to have important federally funded research just sitting in a basement because someone “didn't like the way it came out.” I hope you share my concern and will provide the leadership to ensure all federally funded research is published in a timely manner so stakeholders and policymakers can make informed decisions.

Sincerely,



Barry Carpenter
President and CEO
North American Meat Institute

Cc: Catherine Woteki, Ph.D., Chief Scientist, USDA
Luciana Borio, M.D., Acting Chief Scientist, U.S. Food and Drug Administration