

Achieving Clinton Policy Priorities Through a Comprehensive Food Policy Strategy

The state of our food system is a determinant of quality of health, educational effectiveness, economic development, racial equity, environmental sustainability and our national security. The Obama Administration has led critical progress towards a food system that has shown improvements on each of these fronts. The Clinton Administration will have an opportunity to impact many of its own policy priorities by focusing attention on parts of the food system where more attention is still needed.

Despite robust US food production, 14 percent of Americans are undernourished, and one in three Americans is obese as a result of malnourishment. Insufficient nutrition affects early childhood development and academic performance. People of color are more likely to suffer from diet-related disease, live in food deserts, and hold low-paying food system jobs.

Up to 40 percent of the food we produce is never consumed, resulting in a loss of \$161 billion dollars, according to US Department of Agriculture (USDA) data. US food policy has global ramifications as well. Food scarcity has played a major role in recent conflicts in the Middle East. And the military tells us that rampant obesity among potential recruits is a leading concern for military readiness.

The federal government and the private sector devote significant resources to address the symptoms of these problems. In 2014, the USDA spent \$100 billion on its 18 domestic food assistance programs, according to the GAO. In 2014, the three most prevalent diet-related diseases in the United States—diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension—resulted in an economic burden of \$935.2 billion, according to the Milken Institute School of Public Health.

It is now understood that all of these issues touched by our food system are interconnected, and a holistic approach to addressing them is warranted.

The next president has a breakthrough opportunity to create the country's first comprehensive food policy strategy, positively impacting health, education, environmental, and economic outcomes. Setting a proactive food policy strategy, and appointing an executive to shepherd coordination across the federal government and progress across key constituencies, would build upon the Obama successes and significantly contribute towards progress on a number of key Clinton policy priorities.

The Need for Food Policy Coordination

The White House has an opportunity to implement a proactive food policy agenda by setting a direction for the many departments and dozens of agencies that share food policy jurisdiction. There is significant overlap between the departments and agencies that oversee food policy: Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services (HHS), Commerce, Treasury, and Interior; the Federal Trade Commission; Office of Management and Budget; and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For instance, USDA and HHS jointly develop the Dietary Guidelines. And three departments—USDA, HHS, and EPA—share jurisdiction over food safety inspection alone, a crucial health policy area.

Without a proactive agenda, the White House is often called upon to step in after the fact and clean up duplicated efforts and confusion. For example, overlapping jurisdiction has led to departments releasing conflicting messages that confuse producers, regulators, and consumers. In July 2016, as the Senate was considering the Roberts-Stabenow GMO labeling bill, the FDA unwittingly released guidance that ran

counter to the White House and USDA perspective. In May 2015, President Obama announced an initiative to save honeybees, and the EPA's efforts to respond to President Obama's initiative ran into conflict with the USDA's public position on bee pesticides. An active food policy voice in the White House will streamline policy planning, send clear messages to consumers, and give the market certainty.

The Obama Administration's Rural Council and Tribal Council have effectively demonstrated what can be accomplished when a high ranking official is able to coordinate action across the federal government, cutting red tape, connecting dots between disparate internal and external stakeholders and drawing resources to critical needs. This cross-government council approach, with the clout of the EOP but without the infrastructure investment of other statutory offices, has demonstrated that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

A Federal Food Policy Council

A Federal Food Policy Council, comprised of representatives from relevant departments and agencies, is the most efficient mechanism to proactively set the next administration's food policy priorities and a strategy to accomplish them. The Council should be chaired by a senior executive tasked with coordinating progress against objectives and helping to ensure that departments and agencies work together cohesively, more effectively and efficiently accomplishing the administration's agenda. A successful Chair would utilize the Council mechanism to carry out this comprehensive strategy by setting an agenda in concert with the Cabinet, determining priorities, managing stakeholders, and aligning food policy initiatives with the Executive Office of the President.

This structure would drive greater impact of the US food system on the economy, global trade, health, education, national security, and sustainability. To be successful, the Chair would sit directly within the Executive Office of the President as the policy strategy would touch on issues that intersect with the Office of Legislative Affairs, National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, Rural Council, Council on Environmental Quality, Office of Public Engagement and Cabinet Affairs. The Food Policy Council and its Chair, if positioned well would help engage the many and diverse external food system stakeholders with one administration voice.

Impacting Clinton Administration Policy Priorities

The introduction of a Federal Food Policy Council is particularly timely given Secretary Clinton's policy priorities. The next administration will oversee reauthorization of the child nutrition bill, impacting early childhood development and educational success. The reauthorization of the farm bill in 2018 will have a dramatic impact on rural jobs, small business support and economic development. Implementation of regulations within the Food Safety Modernization Act and the development of the Dietary Guidelines in 2019 will impact health, safety and nutrition. And the effectiveness and equity of food production and distribution are dependent upon the anticipated Administration-led immigration and wage reform.

These upcoming policy challenges cut across the federal government and their impact is far reaching. A comprehensive and coordinated approach to these challenges will accelerate progress towards a better food system and several of Secretary Clinton's greatest priorities.