



It's time for a second Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health

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Fifty-two years ago, President Nixon convened the first and still only [White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health](#).

This seminal bipartisan event brought together diverse leaders from public and private sectors to craft real solutions to address widespread hunger in America. Of its 1,800 concrete recommendations, 1,650 were implemented two years after the conference. This included many of the federal food and nutrition programs we take for granted today, significantly reducing hunger in America.

Fifty-two years later, the food and nutrition problems we face have changed dramatically. While more than [14 million](#) households still struggle with food insecurity, rates of obesity and diabetes have skyrocketed. [Diet-related diseases](#) have become the leading cause of poor health and preventable health care spending. [More than half](#) of American children have poor quality diets, which further [threatens](#) national security. At the same time, farmers and rural communities are struggling and the nation's natural resources are being rapidly consumed.

It's time for a second White House conference to solve these modern challenges. Our food system is complex, touching multiple aspects of our lives, economy and planet. Fixing it will require innovative solutions. A new conference is crucial to bring together the diverse stakeholders to connect these dots, advance the conversation and elevate actions above business-as-usual to achieve meaningful impact and change.

We face a special moment in time. COVID-19 has highlighted the fragility of our food system, with fractured supply chains, lost jobs, food waste and school closures all increasing hunger and nutrition insecurity. And, the pandemic is far more severe due to underlying high rates of obesity, diabetes and other diet-related conditions, all top contributors to poor outcomes from [COVID-19](#).

Addressing hunger and poor nutrition is also foundational to America's re-awakened struggle against racism and poverty. Black and Hispanic Americans, people living in rural and lower-income counties and those in the south and southwest suffer the greatest disparities in diet quality, nutrition security and corresponding diet-related diseases. The [resulting inequities](#) are profound, harming families and leaving communities behind.

Food and nutrition are also fundamental to building back a better national health and science [infrastructure](#), advancing [food is medicine](#) interventions and lowering health care spending and boosting business innovation and job creation.

Food is also central to addressing climate change and its shocks. Globally, the food system contributes to [25 percent](#) of greenhouse gases, the majority of ocean and freshwater [pollution](#), [70 percent](#) of water use, and [80 percent](#) of all deforestation. These impacts are depleting our resources including our land, water, topsoil, forests and biodiversity.

The 1969 White House conference was successful because it had the direct backing of the president, support of bipartisan congressional leaders Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) and Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), and careful planning and organization, led by future Tufts University President Jean Mayer, that involved multiple working groups who reviewed and prepared specific policy proposals leading up to the conference.

Like the original conference, this second conference would be an essential convening of private and public stakeholders — including multiple federal agencies and bipartisan congressional leadership — and incorporate significant advance work to develop clear policy proposals. This will be instrumental to build a national consensus strategy around food and nutrition, with a concrete plan of action and clear benchmarks to measure success.

To address the issues we face, while increasing and shifting U.S. agricultural productivity to provide nourishing food to a hungry world, calls for interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder cooperation. No one department or agency, business sector, advocacy group or academic institution can do this alone. A coordinated government approach, together with businesses and civil society, must identify win-win solutions for greater health, equity, sustainability and revenues — true profits for all.

It's time to bring together the nation in a unifying mission to fix food. Our country's poor metabolic health, spiraling health care costs, high levels of nutrition insecurity, persistent racial disparities and warming climate demand real solutions. We call on the Biden administration to take advantage of this unique moment in our nation's history and build a new national consensus and strategy around food. Like in 1969, a new White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health will be a springboard for policy actions and have far-reaching implications for a reimagined U.S. food system.

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