

# Make Dietetics Great (Again?):

Challenges and Opportunities for the Registered Dietitian in the era of MAHA

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# Thesis:

## Turmoil and Chaos Can & Does Catalyze Change

- Nutrition has long advanced because of chaos and hardship
  - WWI & II:
    - Food Guides
    - RDAs
    - Profession of Dietetics
  - Malnutrition Scare of the 1960s
    - Women, Infants & Children Special Supplemental Nutrition Program
    - Expanded SNAP, NSLP
    - Dietary Guidelines



*Annual Review of Nutrition*

Make America Healthy, Again?  
The Past, Present and Future of  
Dietary Guidelines

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# A Snapshot of Recent Events

- RFK Jr as HHS Secretary
  - In charge of NIH, CDC, FDA CMS etc
- Raw Milk shots in the Oval Office
- Contrarian Influencers Guiding the DGAs
- Grandiose (but intangible) 'MAHA' Reports
- Rise of the political-cultural movement of MAHA
- Anti-Fluoride Advocacy
- Corporate Bullying - Food Dyes, Additives, HFCS (Cane Sugar), Seed Oils (beef tallow)
- Ultraprocessed Foods
- Operation Stork Speed - Update IFA
- Folate/Leucovorin & Autism
- SNAP restrictions
- Research Cuts
  - NIH
  - +Kevin Hall Departure
  - + Beltsville USDA Closure
- Vitamin A for measles
- GRAS loophole
- Supplements



# What has been the response of RDs?

- At-large, the response from Dietitians has been limited
  - Some enthusiasm
  - Some pushback
  - Mostly watchful waiting
  - Largely quiet from professional organizations until..
    - SNAP-Ed cuts
- “We are the food and nutrition experts”

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**Call to Action: Ensuring Science-Based Nutrition Leadership and Advocacy**

**738**  
Verified signatures

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**Lucille Beseler MS RDN CDCES FAND** • 1st  
Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist • Food & Nutrition Advocate • Nutri...  
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Why Registered Dietitians Should Support the "Make America Healthy Again" Initiative

As a Registered Dietitian with over three decades of experience, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of obesity and type 2 diabetes on individuals and families. Early in my career, I recognized the critical need for targeted interventions for overweight and obese children. Addressing their health challenges required more than dietary adjustments—it demanded a comprehensive approach that included education, behavioral support, and advocacy. The lessons learned from helping these children have carried over to my work with adults managing type 2 diabetes, a preventable but increasingly prevalent disease.

The "Make America Healthy Again" initiative aligns with the very essence of our profession: improving lives through evidence-based, personalized care. By engaging in this movement, Registered Dietitians have an opportunity to champion prevention, advocate for sustainable health policies, and implement practical strategies that address the root causes of chronic diseases like obesity and diabetes.

Our role extends beyond individual consultations—we are leaders in shaping a healthier society. By supporting this initiative, we can elevate our impact, expand access to critical nutrition services, and reduce the long-term healthcare burden. Together, we can make a measurable difference, one patient and one policy at a time.

Registered Dietitians are uniquely positioned to be the change agents in this national effort. Let's seize the moment to amplify our expertise and drive real progress in making America healthy again.

STAT+ HEALTH

**How a Colorado dietitian became Instagram's top MAHA critic**

Jessica Knurick wants to reach the MAHA moms who've been swept up in misinformation.





<https://www.instagram.com/drjessicaknurick>

Dietitian Jessica Knurick has become one of social media's most prominent evidence-based critics of the Make America Healthy Again movement. Ourway

most popular

# Not our first (silent) rodeo

- ~2015, concerns about genetic engineering (GMOs) were all the rage yet Nutrition Societies provided zero public guidance
- Missed opportunities:
  - Current MAHA is covering topics, influenced by political/social actors of the 2009-2022 era

ASN American Society for Nutrition  
Excellence in Nutrition Research and Practice

About Publications Meetings & Education Membership Advocacy & Science Policy Foundation Trust in Nutrition Science ASN News

By Kevin Klatt

The National Academies of Science, the World Health Organization, The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the European Food Safety Authority and Food Standards Australia New Zealand are just a few of the international organizations that have position papers on the use of genetic engineering as it applies to food. These reports all conclude that genetically modified foods present no unique safety threats compared to traditionally bred crops and/or have not been linked to detrimental human health outcomes (the Genetic Literacy Project has a nice infographic depicting these organizations here). Notably missing from this extensive list are, oddly, nutrition organizations.

Two of the major American nutrition organizations are the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) and the American Society for Nutrition (ASN). The AND does not currently have a position on genetic engineering; however, its member center (1) informs us that a new Evidence Analysis Library paper entitled "Advanced Technology in Food Production" is due to come out soon. ASN does not have an official position paper on genetic engineering, either. Rather, genetically engineered foods are briefly mentioned in two of their publications: "Processed Foods: contributions to nutrition" (2) and "Nutrition Research to Affect Food and A Healthy Lifespan" (3).

At a time when misinformation about genetically engineered crops is all too common in the public discourse, it seems rather odd that neither of the two largest nutrition organizations are providing guidance on or actively engaging in this topic of conversation. Nevertheless, the conversation

NUTRIENT-GENE INTERACTIONS

## Tardy to the Party – Nutrition in the Genetic Engineering Conversation

January 14, 2015 by \*ASN Member Contributor

POLITICS Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Add Topic +

### 'If you can't pronounce it, don't eat it': Meet the food blogger influencing RFK Jr.

A food blogger from Charlotte, North Carolina, is getting top billing at the White House thanks to President Donald Trump and Robert F Kennedy Jr.'s Make America Healthy Again agenda

Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy USA TODAY

April 19, 2025 Updated April 24, 2025, 11:29 a.m. ET

ARE YOU EATING THIS BANNED INGREDIENT?

# Other Happenings - Dietetic Discontent

- Dietitians - largely fueled by LinkedIn commentary - have been increasingly vocal about their concerns about the profession
  - Pay
  - Cost of Loans
  - MS requirement
  - Respect
  - Concerns about AI
  - GLP1RAs



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

## Programs & Initiatives

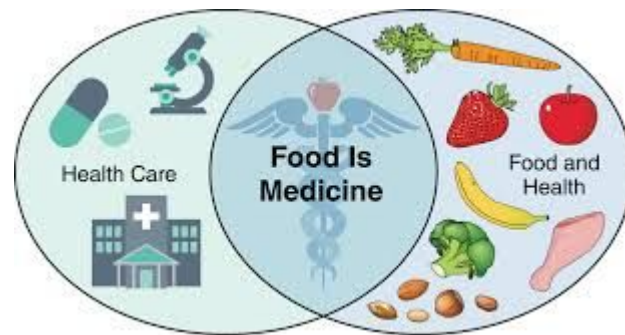
### Sponsorship and Sponsor Involvement

The NAM received \$140,000 from Google to support NAM staff facilitation of the expert panel and production of a publication between May 2023 and May 2024. Members of the expert panel conduct their evaluations of the answer set independently to ensure objectivity. Google staff participate in working meetings with panel members to review and clarify evaluation outputs.

- Validating Health Information Provided by GenAI

# Other Happenings - Physician Nutrition Education & “Food As/Is Medicine”

- Scope of Practice showdown - who ‘owns’ or ‘does’ nutrition
  - Requirements for medical school nutrition education
    - Language from HHS about American healthcare ignoring nutrition (no mention of RDs)
  - Large push for ‘Food as Medicine’
    - Tensions over who pays for nutrition care
  - Huge growth of influencers focused on nutrition
    - ‘Integrative’, ‘lifestyle’, ‘functional’ medicine



## RFK Jr. to tell medical schools to teach nutrition or lose federal funding

The health secretary says he will issue the edict within a year

By [Will McDuffie](#)  
June 4, 2025, 1:38 PM



# Other Happenings - Collapse In Institutional Trust

- Perception that nearly all health institutions bought out by BigX
  - Dietetic curriculum bought/paid for by BigFood
- DGAs cast as industry-influenced/aligned
- CDC Shooting
- FDA GRAS System
- Skepticism of community water fluoridation, folic acid fortification of grains



# Reflecting on the past 12 months

- Nutrition is a driving force at the center of cultural, political and economic issues
- There's a deep hunger for nutrition information across society
- The information economy has changed
  - post-COVID changes
    - Deep distrust
    - Story-telling, Nuance facilitate trust
- There's a void of trustworthy, nutrition expertise
  - Cross-cutting from nutritional biochemistry, evidence-based practice & chronic disease, food systems, food economics, public policy
  - Thesis:
    - RDs can't touch on every issue but are missing out on a lot
    - RDs are the closest to filling that expertise void, if we step things up



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### TITLE III—DIETARY GUIDANCE

ENFORCEMENT OF DIETARY GUIDELINES.


was—(1) by GENERAL—At least every five years, the shall publish a report entitled, "Dietary Guidelines to". Each such report shall contain nutritional and d

to not guidelines for the general public, and shall be to each Federal agency is serving not any Federal food, or guidelines—The information and guidelines are, each report required for the program, and shall be based on the of the scientific and medical knowledge which is the time the report is prepared.

#### What To Expect When You're Expecting.... New DGAs...

Uncertainty about the future of Dietary...

AUG 19 • KEVIN C. KLATT, PH.D, RD



#### Nutrition Training for Physicians

Mandatory MedEd & CMEs incoming

JUL 11 • KEVIN C. KLATT, PH.D, RD

## RFK Jr., HHS to Link Autism to Tylenol Use in Pregnancy and Folate Deficiencies

Kennedy's autism report, touted by Trump, will suggest that using the pain reliever during pregnancy might be linked to the developmental disorder

By Liz Eskey Whyte [Follow](#) and Nikhil Subhramaniam [Follow](#)

Updated Sept. 5, 2025 5:13 pm ET

The report is said to highlight the pain reliever Tylenol, when taken during pregnancy, along with low levels of **folate**, a vitamin that is important for proper development of a baby's brain and spine, as potential causes of autism, according to the Wall Street Journal. It will also name folic acid, a form of **folate** also known as **l-methionine**, as a **test to decrease symptoms of**

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Science & Medicine Creators Uniting for Public Health.

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## Meeting People Where They Are: Scientist-Creators Delivering Trusted Health Information on Social Media and Beyond

As the information landscape rapidly changes, and trust in health institutions fades, falsehoods are spreading 6 times faster than the truth. With 1 in 2 Americans getting their health information on social media, we can't rely on traditional channels alone. The Evidence Collective meets people where they are, uniting trusted health communicators to deliver clear, evidence-based information directly on social platforms, as well as other virtual and physical communities, listening to questions and concerns, and filling information voids from a place of empathy and speed.

FAS FEDERATION OF AMERICAN SCIENTISTS

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### Establish A Network Of Centers Of Excellence In Human Nutrition (CEHN) To Overcome The Data Drought In Nutrition Science Research

EMERGING TECHNOLOGY DAY ONE PROJECT

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Health experts have long recommended limiting it, but Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has signaled a shift in that advice.

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The study is likely to further inflame politicized debates over water fluoridation

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Mind & body, Research

## As RFK Jr. moves toward radically simplified nutritional guidelines, a Berkeley scientist looks back at their history

Kevin Klatt, a nutrition research scientist, explores how the history of American nutritional guidelines informs major changes being proposed today.

Unearthed

## Everything is protein, but protein isn't everything. Here's what to know.

We're being inundated with protein. There's more to the muscle mass and weight loss equation.

October 23, 2025

Welcom

8 min [Summary](#) [Like](#) [Bookmark](#) [Comment](#) 130

Raw milk! Beef tallow sunscreen! Seed oil-free pizza! The Make America Healthy Again movement is impacting government policy and the grocery aisle, with entrepreneurs and conglomerates alike vying for a piece of the organic pie. Which trends will have a lasting impact, which will sour faster than raw milk, and are any of them actually making us healthier?

BY RINA RAPHAEL PUBLISHED: SEP 15, 2025 9:00 AM ET

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# Critical Reflections

| Reflect On                  | Current  | Path Forward   |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Culture shift in dietetics  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "We are the food and nutrition experts"</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- we need to curate genuine expertise (research leadership, guidelines, specialization, advanced degrees)</li> </ul>  |
| Education Standards         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standards that promote box checking over genuine expertise</li> <li>- Bare minimum for 'Entry-level dietitian'</li> <li>- 3+ professions in 1 degree</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- research engagement, critical thinking from day 1</li> <li>- strong scientific &amp; clinical base speaking the same language as physicians</li> <li>- applied practical skills for the 21st century</li> </ul>       |
| Professional Orgs           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- behave more like trade groups than scientific, public health orgs</li> <li>- siloed, poorly coordinated functions</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bastions of expertise</li> <li>- strong communicators &amp; advocates</li> <li>- networked with other medical/scientific/pubhealth orgs</li> </ul>  |
| Get out of dietetics        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- dietetic and clinical nutrition org memberships</li> <li>- speak a language no one else speaks</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RDs in different specializations across major medical orgs</li> <li>- active in nutrition working groups across societies</li> <li>- sitting on guidelines, helping with comms, etc</li> </ul>                        |
| Getting into upper echelons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RDs minimal/absent at top levels of research, NIH, CDC, FDA, Professional Societies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- academic programs, professional orgs need to work to place RDs everywhere</li> <li>- fund/incentivize advanced degree and specializations</li> <li>- partner to develop fellowships with other orgs</li> </ul>        |
| Communication               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited Comms</li> <li>- Old school, PR, media-trained (inauthentic)</li> <li>- Low trust forms of communication</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Post on X/Bluesky/IG/TikTok</li> <li>- <b><u>Network with impactful people</u></b>, provide expertise</li> <li>- Breakdown misinformation</li> <li>- Tell Stories, Detail what real nutrition is all about</li> </ul> |

# Conclusion

- The rise of MAHA, changes in the media landscape, movements like 'Food As/Is Medicine' have revealed gaps in the nutrition landscape
  - Craving for nuanced, authentic-feeling information
  - Mixed messages about who is a 'nutrition expert'
    - Many professions and individuals trying to seize the social and political capital
    - Few doing much to actually be experts
- Dietitians are energetic, type A and have diverse training in nutrition
  - Where are we putting our efforts?
  - We need a strategic plan (ideally internationally coordinated!) to position dietitians as broadly recognized experts in food nutrition
    - Step 1: acknowledge reality
    - Carry this conversation forward in your practice groups, at your universities, in your professional societies
    - Make the change so that when MAHA comes for you, the BDA is poised to tackle it



# Discussion!

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