

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C 20250

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Dept of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C 20201

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Becerra:

We write regarding recent press reports concerning the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) (2025-2030) and the possible reclassification of potatoes as a grain, instead of a vegetable. The scientific justification behind the assertion that potatoes are not vegetables is not strong, and there are documented nutritional benefits of potatoes. Therefore, we strongly oppose any reclassification of potatoes to the grain category under the DGAs.

Since the inception of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), it has classified potatoes correctly as a vegetable. There is no debate about the physical characteristics of the potato and its horticultural scientific classification. Unlike grains, white potatoes are strong contributors of potassium, calcium, vitamin C, vitamin B6, and fiber. A medium baked potato contains 15 percent of the daily recommended value of dietary fiber, 27 percent of the daily recommended value for vitamin B6, and 28 percent of the daily recommended value of vitamin C. In fact, potatoes have more potassium than bananas, a food that is commonly associated with being high in potassium.

If potatoes were to be reclassified, consumers would miss out on vital nutrients. In addition, any change to potatoes' current classification under the DGAs would immediately confuse consumers, retailers, restaurant operators, growers, and the entire supply chain. That is one of the reasons that the trade groups of both sides of this classification debate have filed comments in opposition to potatoes being defined as anything other than a vegetable. In addition, our federal nutrition programs rely on the DGAs to ensure that program beneficiaries are receiving well-balanced, nutritious food. Such a change could also come at a cost to our nation's schools. Under the National School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs, schools already struggle to meet vegetable consumption recommendations at a reasonable cost, and potatoes are often the most affordable vegetable.

Finally, classifying potatoes as a grain instead of a vegetable would also go against [a 2013 National Library of Medicine Study](#) titled *White Potatoes, Human Health, and Dietary Guidance*. This study found that

... potatoes should be included in the vegetable group because they contribute critical nutrients. All white vegetables, including white potatoes, provide nutrients needed in the diet and deserve a prominent position in food guides.

Given this strong, fact-backed assertion produced from the National Library of Medicine study, it does not make any sense for your departments to reclassify potatoes as a grain.

We strongly urge you to avoid reclassifying potatoes as a grain or suggest grains and potatoes are interchangeable. Given the rapid timeline that the DGAs are on, we ask that you provide us an update on this issue as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator




Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



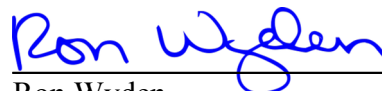
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator