

USDA Hire Stokes Dietary Guidelines Controversy

The National Center for Public Policy Research

New York, Washington DC — The naming of an "environmental nutritionist" to a top USDA nutrition post is drawing fire from the National Center for Public Policy Research's Risk Analysis Division.

In an op-ed published in Friday's Des Moines Register, "[Iowa's USDA Appointment Raises Concern](#) [1]," Risk Analysis Division Director Jeff Stier writes, "The appointment of Iowa's Angela Tagtow, a controversial 'environmental nutritionist' and local food activist, to head the United States Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion is causing more headaches for the agency, already facing criticism about politicization of federal nutrition advice and its consequences for public health."

Stier earlier criticized the federal Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) and its work to establish new recommendations for federal nutrition policy. Stier's concerns have been widely echoed over recent months, given the DGAC's mission creep towards environmental activism. The DGAC is meeting this week in Washington.

In that context, "the appointment of 'food crusader' Angela Tagtow to a USDA position responsible for assessing and implementing the Committee's recommendations is cause for serious concern," says Stier.

In the op-ed, Stier writes, "By using the government's official dietary guidelines as a tool to advance her well-established environmentalist agenda, Tagtow would undermine the USDA's mandate - to provide families with science-based, impartial nutrition advice. The USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services administer the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), which makes recommendations regarding the congressionally mandated Dietary Guidelines. The guidelines, currently being revised, are the basis for Federal food and nutrition programs and welfare benefits such as SNAP and educational campaigns, including MyPlate (formerly the Food Pyramid). The USDA touts them to be 'authoritative advice for people two years and older about how good dietary habits can promote health and reduce risk for major chronic diseases.'"

Stier writes, "According to Politico, recent DGAC meetings raised eyebrows because 'hot-button issues, such as diet and climate change' are being discussed in an unprecedented way. The committee has even dedicated one of five subcommittees to 'Food Sustainability and Safety' to discuss how the food we eat contributes to climate change, and how the government should recommend changes to our diets based on those concerns."

While Stier agrees that maintaining a food supply and environmental protection are important, he says, "these issues don't belong in discussions of healthy eating. But

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

that hasn't stopped the DGAC from delving deeply into them over the past year. In the January meeting of the DGAC, committee member Miriam Nelson [gushed](#) [2] about the importance of promoting foods that have the "littlest impact on the environment," and invited testimony from sustainability expert Kate Clancy, who argued it would be "perilous" not to take global climate change into account when dispensing dietary advice.

Stier's earlier criticism drew rebuke from the USDA, for being "premature." In April, a USDA spokesperson seemed to back away from the row by minimizing DGAC's role in policy-making, saying, "the committee is still in the early stages of its work, so it is premature to guess what their recommendations might be, and even more premature to speculate about what will be included in the final dietary guidelines."

That seems to have changed, Stier notes. "But the appointment of Tagtow to the USDA office responsible for not only developing and promoting the Dietary Guidelines, but advancing prominent programs such as MyPlate, the re-vamped version of the well-known food pyramid, suggests that the agency is doubling down on raising the profile of our diet's alleged affect on the climate, and other issue that have more to do with political science, than nutritional science."

Stier slams Tagtow's firm's [mission statement](#) [3] as code language for politically charged activism.

Her firm's goal was "to establish healthier food systems that are resilient, sustainable, ecologically sound, socially acceptable and economically viable..."

Stier points out that Tagtow [has written](#) [4] that we should select meat and dairy products from animals that have only been fed grass diets.

In the op-ed, Stier challenges the USDA's new nutrition expert for repeating the "myth that meat is an environmentally-reckless form of protein, suggesting a plant-based diet instead. She says we should reduce our consumption of meat, lean or not, not because of any potential health benefits, but in order to 'conserve natural resources and energy.'"

Stier also debunks Tagtow's alleged economic justifications for her radical agenda. "Tagtow has suggested that lowans could improve the state's economy by only eating food grown in the state, at least part of the year. She [touted](#) [5] a Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture study claiming that 'if lowans ate five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and Iowa farmers supplied that produce for three months of the year, these additional crops would add \$300 million and more than 4,000 jobs to the Iowa economy.'"

"She fails to mention that in her utopian Iowa, residents wouldn't likely enjoy the benefits of staples like oranges or pineapples for those months. Nor does she consider the devastation to Iowa's agricultural community if her agro-protectionist ideals were implemented in other states. Well, now she's headed to the federal government to promote her narrow ideology."

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Stier concludes, "The maxim that, in government, 'personnel is policy' is especially true here, given Tagtow's policy-making role. The priorities she's spent her career advancing are far from the consensus among mainstream nutritionists. Her appointment is a slap in the face to thousands of men and women in nutrition who daily work tirelessly and impartially to help Americans eat better. And it casts doubt over whether USDA is willing to dispense nutrition advice based on science rather than an activist agenda."

Stier has written on this issue in the past, raising concerns over the Committee's direction in a March piece in the [Washington Examiner](#) [6] and in the [Daily Caller](#) [7] in April of this year. He is available for press requests on this issue.

New York City-based Jeff Stier is a Senior Fellow at the National Center for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C., and heads its [Risk Analysis Division](#) [8]. Stier is a frequent guest on CNBC, and has addressed health policy on CNN, Fox News Channel and [Al Jazeera America](#) [9], as well as network newscasts. Stier's National Center op-eds have been published in top outlets, including the Los Angeles Times, the [New York Post](#) [10], Newsday, Forbes, the Washington Examiner and [National Review Online](#) [11]. He also frequently discusses risk issues on Twitter at @JeffaStier.

Stier has testified at FDA scientific meetings, met with members of Congress and their staff about science policy, met with OMB/OIRA officials, submitted testimony to state government legislative hearings, and testified at the [United Nations](#) [12] (video [here](#) [13]).

Stier previously worked in both the office of the mayor and in the corporation counsel's office during the Giuliani administration in New York City. His responsibilities included planning environmental agency programs, legal analysis of proposed legislation, and health policy. Mr. Stier also is chairman of the board of the Jewish International Connection, NY. While earning his law degree at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, he served two terms as editor-in-chief of the Cardozo Law Forum.

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