



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 16, 2010

Feds Fight Fat by Frying Freedom

If you think what you put into your body is your business alone, think again. The federal government, run by people who suffer from “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy” (as H.L. Mencken memorably defined Puritanism), is stepping up its war on Americans’ eating habits.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture is issuing new nutrition guidelines in an effort “to battle the obesity epidemic,” [reports ABC News](#). The new guidelines recommend cuts in saturated fat and transfat intake, a major reduction in sodium consumption, and an increase in potassium intake. They also encourage “eating more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, and low-fat milk and dairy products while cutting back on refined grains, added sugars, and solid fats — particularly those found in sugar-sweetened beverages and desserts,” according to ABC News. Forget taking vitamins, too: The USDA is against that; but it is *for* moderate alcohol consumption. Go figure.

ABC News notes that “nutrition guidelines were first published in 1980 and are reviewed every five years.” Considering that Americans’ waistlines have steadily increased since then and corresponding health problems have grown accordingly, it may safely be said that government nutrition guidelines, like every other government program, are an abject failure.

What happens when a government program fails? It is continued, and more programs are piled on top of it to remedy the problems the first program created. Thus, the government’s recommendations, says ABC News, “also call for policymakers and the food industry to become engaged in the fight.” Further, the “report wisely recommends that USDA and [the Department of Health and Human Services] develop a national strategy to help people eat better, including ... getting industry to provide more-healthy products,” said Margo G. Wootan, nutrition policy director for the left-wing Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Connie Diekman of Washington University in St. Louis said the key to changing the American diet will be “helping consumers change their taste palate so that the shift in food choices is available.”

Implementing all of this, of course, will require new regulations, new bureaucracy, and new spending; and you can be sure the big agricultural and food processing interests will use it to their advantage.

Meanwhile, the First Lady is also [trumpeting](#) new anti-obesity measures on her website, Let’s Move. Says the website: “More than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income



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urban and rural neighborhoods that are more than a mile from a supermarket. These communities, where access to affordable, quality, and nutritious foods is limited, are known as food deserts.”

Her solution — surprise, surprise — is more federal spending:

As part of the President’s proposed FY 2011 budget, the Administration announced a new program ... which will invest \$400 million a year to provide innovative financing to bring grocery stores to underserved areas and help places such as convenience stores and bodegas carry healthier food options. Grants will also help bring farmers markets and fresh foods into underserved communities, boosting both family health and local economies. Through these initiatives and private sector engagement, the Administration will work to eliminate food deserts across the country within seven years.

Where is this \$400 million a year going to come from? The U.S. government is already \$13 trillion in debt. Where does the federal government get the authority to implement these programs? Certainly not from the Constitution, which authorizes no such thing. What are the odds that after seven years we’ll have more, rather than fewer, “food deserts”? The record of government programs is not encouraging.

These initiatives are part of a larger trend of attempting to alter Americans’ lifestyles to conform to politicians’ and bureaucrats’ ideals. ObamaCare, too, is rife with programs to change our behavior under the guise of preventing obesity, improving nutrition, and so on. Section 4001 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, to take perhaps the most egregious example, establishes the National Prevention, Health Promotion and Public Health Council, which is actually charged with creating “a list of national priorities on health promotion and disease prevention *to address lifestyle behavior modification*” with regard to “smoking cessation, proper nutrition, appropriate exercise, mental health, behavioral health, substance use disorder, and domestic violence screenings.” (Emphasis added.) President Obama issued an [executive order](#) creating the council on June 10.

To those who object to government behavior modification for the alleged purpose of improving people’s health, there is the standard response: Since taxpayers have to foot the bill for so many people’s healthcare (ultimately everyone’s under ObamaCare and Medicare), the government has the right to tell people how to live. This, as Walter Williams is fond of reminding us, is precisely a problem of too much socialism, not too much freedom. Get rid of the mandate that Peter pay for Paul’s healthcare, and both Peter and Paul can be left to live as they please, with each bearing the cost of his own decisions. That way lies liberty. The other way lies tyranny; and perhaps especially because it is “exercised for the good of its victims,” in the words of C.S. Lewis, it “may be the most oppressive” tyranny of all.



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