Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We, as scientists who study diet and health, are writing in support of the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s (CSPI) petition for a label that warns consumers that frequent consumption of processed meat, such as bacon, hot dogs, and ham, increases the risk of developing colorectal cancer. The suggested label would state:

**USDA Warning:** Frequent consumption of processed meat and poultry products may increase your risk of developing cancer of the colon and rectum. To protect your health, limit your consumption of such products.

The petition is based in part on the large body of research reported on in the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC, a division of the World Health Organization) monograph evaluating the carcinogenicity of consumption of red and processed meat. In October 2015, IARC classified processed meat as being “carcinogenic to humans.” IARC’s conclusion was preceded by advice to consumers from other leading cancer authorities, including the American Cancer Society and World Cancer Research Fund International, to reduce consumption of processed meat because it is associated with an increased risk of cancer.

People want clear and accurate information about potential health hazards in the foods they eat to help them make wise choices at the grocery store and restaurants. Food that is associated with cancer risks is certainly a matter of great public concern. Research reviewed by IARC indicates that consuming 50 grams per day of processed meat is associated with an 18 percent increased risk of developing colorectal cancer. That level

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1 Center for Science in the Public Interest. Petition requesting FSIS to issue a label on processed meat. 2016.
of risk is highly significant as it may have contributed to as many as 5,000 deaths from colorectal cancer in the United States in 2015.\(^7\)

The federal government has an obligation to inform the public about risky foods, such as processed meats, and ways to mitigate those risks. The causes of many cancers are unknown or unavoidable. However, here epidemiological studies have identified a clear-cut cause of thousands of cases of colorectal cancer annually and the prevention measure that people could take to reduce their risk. USDA, in its important public health role, has the jurisdiction and authority to require a label informing the public about this risk. For example, USDA has used its authority to protect public health by requiring labels warning about pathogenic bacteria on meat and poultry products\(^8\) and risks associated with mechanically tenderized beef.\(^9\) The CSPI petition requests that USDA take similar action with regard to processed meat, which poses a much greater risk.

Please give the petition submitted by CSPI your careful attention and consider acting on its request for a label on processed meat that informs the public about the risk of developing colorectal cancer from its frequent consumption and how to mitigate that risk.

Sincerely,

(Affiliations listed for identification purposes only.)

Charles S. Fuchs, MD, MPH  
Chief, Division of Gastrointestinal Oncology  
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute  
Professor of Medicine  
Harvard Medical School  
Boston, MA

Edward Giovannucci, MD, ScD  
Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology  
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and  
Associate Professor of Medicine  
Harvard Medical School  
Boston, MA


Frank Hu, MD, PhD  
Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology  
Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health  
Professor of Medicine  
Harvard Medical School  
Boston, MA

Lawrence H. Kushi, ScD  
Director of Scientific Policy  
Division of Research  
Kaiser Permanente  
Oakland, CA

Loic Le Marchand, MD, PhD  
Professor of Epidemiology  
University of Hawaii Cancer Center  
Honolulu, HI

JoAnn E. Manson, MD, DrPH  
Professor of Medicine and the  
Michael and Lee Bell Professor of Women's Health  
Harvard Medical School  
Professor, Department of Epidemiology  
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
Boston, MA

John D. Potter, MD PhD  
Member and Senior Advisor  
Division of Public Health Sciences  
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center  
and  
Professor Emeritus of Epidemiology  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA

Frank Sacks, MD  
Professor of Cardiovascular Disease Prevention  
Department of Nutrition and Department of Genetics and Complex Diseases  
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
Boston, MA

Meir Stampfer, MD, DrPH
Professor of Medicine
Harvard Medical School

and

Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition
Departments of Epidemiology and Nutrition
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Boston, MA

Mariana C. Stern, PhD
Associate Professor of Preventive Medicine and Urology
Keck School of Medicine of USC
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Walter Willett, MD, DrPH
Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition
Chair, Department of Nutrition
Departments of Nutrition and Epidemiology
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Boston, MA

Please respond via Michael F. Jacobson, Executive Director, CSPI, mjacobson@cspinet.org