



Fixing America's Broken Food System

A NATIONAL IMPERATIVE

What Is Wrong with America's Food System?

Over the past several decades, Americans have faced a growing crisis of chronic conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. These conditions have reduced our quality of life and led to suffering, premature deaths, and rising health care costs. While policymakers, experts, providers and communities have tested many ways to address chronic disease, these efforts have failed so far to adequately reverse these trends, which have implications for our population, health care system and the entire economy.

Today, more than 130 million Americans suffer from chronic disease. In fact, only 12 percent of the American population is metabolically healthy. The prevalence of diabetes, heart disease, and cancers is soaring, while a shocking 1-in-3 American children is obese. This national health epidemic is costing the nation more than \$3.5 trillion annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and 80% of those costs are attributable to preventable chronic disease.

Sadly, marginalized groups are suffering deep disparities in diet, leading to illness, suboptimal school and work performance, increased health costs, lower productivity and wages, and persistently higher poverty and mortality rates. At present, more than 20 million Americans live in communities that are both food deserts (lacking fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy food) and food swamps (filled with fast-food chains and highly processed foods), and most of these are members of racial and ethnic minority populations. As a result, Type 2 diabetes rates have doubled in Black children, tripled in Native American children, and increased 50% in Hispanic youth. In fact, the top five killers of Latinos and Blacks in the U.S. are diet related.

Equally troubling, the COVID-19 pandemic's tragic impact was exacerbated by America's chronic disease epidemic. According to the CDC, most virus victims in the U.S. had at least one chronic condition, and many suffered from multiple chronic diseases. Concluding that chronic conditions heightened Americans' risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, CDC has cited "limited access to nutritious food" as a factor worsening the impact of COVID-19 in the U.S. Put another way, our broken food system contributes to the burden of chronic conditions, and, in turn, to COVID-19's harrowing case and death counts.

In brief, chronic disease is crippling our nation's health, compromising our workforce, weakening national security, and hastening Medicaid and Medicare insolvency. As a result, it's imperative for us to fix the food system that is producing unhealthy foods and fueling the chronic disease crisis.

How Can We Fix Our Broken Food System?

Fortunately, well-documented strategies exist for fixing America's broken food system, including:

- **Treat Food as Medicine:** modernize preventive medicine to combat disease through proper nutrition,
- **Promote Regenerative Organic Agriculture:** modernize farming to improve nutrition content, and
- **Expand Access to Nutritious Food:** put an end to food deserts and swamps across the nation.

With solutions at hand, policymakers have an opportunity to take decisive action and fix our food system.