

## **What happens when the left-right food policy spectrum becomes a circle?**

Changes of leadership at the FDA and the USDA under President-elect Trump could have a large impact on the industry, writes Sean McBride of DSM Communications.

*The following is an op-ed by Sean McBride, He is the founder of DSM Strategic Communications and the former Executive Vice President of Communications and Membership at the Grocery Manufacturers Association (now Consumer Brands Association).*

The food policy dynamic in Washington, D.C., has been consistent for decades. Democrats favor more government intervention in food production and Republicans prefer less. For decades, advocates across the left-right spectrum knew which policymakers to turn to support, oppose or alter legislation and regulation

But all that may be about to change with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s (RFK) presumptive, "Make America Healthy Again," role in the Trump 47 Administration.

It's no secret president-elect Donald Trump disdains government interference in the marketplace. During his first term, he oversaw the effort to abolish two government regulations for every new one proposed by one of his federal agencies. This time, he says he will cut ten existing federal government regulations for each new one put into place.

Trump's pro-marketplace, regulatory-hostile philosophy was a boon to regulated entities during his first term. That includes the food and agriculture sector. Rather quietly, regulated entities in food production largely got what they wanted from the White House on food policy during Trump 45.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), by and large, sided with industry when it issued its Bioengineered Food labeling regime in 2018. Trump's USDA also relaxed school nutrition standards as requested by schools and food service providers.

Over at the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA), the agency "slow walked" voluntary sodium reduction guidelines started under the Obama Administration, delaying final action until President Biden took office. FDA

also delayed implementation dates for restaurant menu labeling and a new version of the Nutrition Facts Label as requested by food companies.

There is sound science behind these decisions, but the outcomes generally align with the arguments proffered by industry organizations.

In 2021 the scales tipped in the other direction. President Biden believes private entities must be watched closely and regulated generously. Thus, it has moved forward with a full court press consisting of aggressive rulemaking designed to change food company recipes, packaging and sales.

To wit, Biden's FDA and USDA are advancing new regulations on food safety, school lunches, front of pack nutrition labeling, sodium, and food chemicals, just to name a few.

However, those who expect the food policy pendulum to swing back in favor of industry with Donald Trump's win should exercise caution. The left-right food policy continuum might "shape-shift" into a circle – with policymakers on the left and right in agreement that government should and must be used as a mechanism to change corporate and consumer behavior in the name of public health.

It's well understood that Republicans, generally, are for smaller government and fewer regulations as things that spark innovation and keep food costs down. Conversely, Democrats, generally, favor bigger government and more regulations to reign in corporate behavior and impact non-communicable diseases.

An RFK Jr. appointment will challenge that long-standing paradigm.

Kennedy is on the record saying he wants to "get toxins out of our food." Does that mean he will get involved in FDA's food chemicals review initiative and push the agency to ban Red Dye No. 3 and Titanium Dioxide? Will he follow the science?

When it comes to government nutrition, CNN reported, "...Kennedy has advocated for regulating chemicals in food – including an idea to swap tallow fat in for seed oils to make McDonald's french fries healthier – and limiting access to soda and processed foods through school lunches and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program."

Going further, RFK said he wants to eradicate corporate influence on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans process and safety reviews of pesticides and chemicals used in food production.

It is also important to note RFK has been joined in his food policy views with some Republicans on Capitol Hill, like Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI).

If Trump 47's Administration and its "Make America Healthy Again" leader start sounding and acting like the NGOs and activist groups that seek to heavily regulate food and agriculture companies, where do those regulated entities go for help from overzealous, scientifically unjustified regulations on things like sodium, food additives, school nutrition, food taxes, front-of-pack nutrition labeling, SNAP choice, crop protection, GMOs and gene editing, etc.?

If this dynamic comes to fruition in the coming months, it presents a tremendous challenge for organizations in food production, as it will be harder to find sympathetic voices when it comes to stopping, altering or slowing down unwarranted government policies aimed at altering the way we make and consume food in the U.S.

So, keep your eye on CDC, FDA, USDA and EPA during the transition and beyond. What happens at those agencies will tell you everything you need to know about the fate of a host of Obama and Biden food policy initiatives, and whether they will fade away or thrive under President Trump 47.

Reference: <https://www.fooddive.com/news/cpg-food-trump-policy-kennedy/732500/>