

A MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE COMMITTED TO FOOD JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

You care about sustainability and you're committed to making a difference. Obesity, viewed as a visible result of a food system gone wrong, is an easy rallying call.

But here's the rub. No matter how often and authoritatively you trumpet fears about obesity, scientific research shows that common assumptions just don't hold up to the evidence. Despite assumptions to the contrary, research shows that the fat and thin are not eating remarkably differently. The fact that some people are heavier is largely a reflection of their particular biological response to current lifestyle habits and environmental conditions. Research also shows that lifestyle changes are much more effective at health improvement than weight loss, even in those rare cases where weight loss is maintained. What we do is much more important than what we weigh.

Trumpeting obesity concerns is not just misguided, but downright damaging. It leads to repeated cycles of weight loss and regain, to food and body preoccupation, self-hatred, eating disorders, weight discrimination, and poor health. Few of us are at peace with our bodies, whether because we're fat or because we fear becoming fat. Every time you make fat the problem, these are side effects, however unintended they may be.

By encouraging good food policy on its own merits, you can address real health concerns, giving both fat and thin people the support they deserve, and avoiding stigmatizing people and worsening the problem.

There is relatively little size diversity among people participating in the food justice movement. This has less to do with the idea that heavier people don't share a commitment to good food, and more to

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do with the community stigmatization. Given that the majority of the U.S. population now fits into the stigmatized categories, anti-obesity campaigns alienate a huge pool of potential supporters and sabotage the cause.

Foodies, I plead with you: Lay off the fat people. Science and reason do not support the value of a weight focus. Switch the emphasis to advocating for good food directly. Stop the demonization and instead invite fat people to join you at the table, celebrating the diversity they bring. Help people of all sizes feel welcome in the White House organic garden. You can make a powerful argument for good food based on social justice, environmental stewardship, animal welfare, or a host of other reasons—you don't need to do it on the backs of fat people.

If you examine the data with an open mind, you can also find some other facts that may surprise you. Did you know that the obesity epidemic—if there ever was such a thing—is long over: child, teen, and adult obesity rates leveled off years ago? That dozens of studies indicate that weight doesn't adversely affect longevity for the vast majority of people—and less than a handful of studies suggest otherwise? And when factors such as activity, nutrition, dieting and weight cycling history, and socioeconomic status are considered, the relationship between weight and disease disappears or is significantly reduced? Studies also show that biologic safeguards prevent most people from maintaining weight loss, despite vigilant dieting and exercise.

Get on board with the new paradigm that shifts the emphasis from weight to health. It's called Health at Every Size. More information can be found in *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (www.HAESbook.com).

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