

**FOOD & AGRICULTURE:
SLAUGHTERING A REGULATORY FOOD FIGHT**

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CASE STUDY

our client

Trade association to major food and agricultural companies

the issue

The government's official dietary guidelines, updated every five years, were up for a rewrite that threatened to demonize the client's products. A government recommendation to eat less of the client's products for health reasons would have been severely detrimental to its freedom to operate.

the challenge

The dietary guidelines process happens largely behind closed doors and had not been of interest to the general public. Nutrition policy had not been a traditional hot-button issue in Washington, so messages and coalition partners had to be assembled from scratch.

the opportunity

There is a well-established and diverse constituency that bristles at the thought of government intruding into deeply personal matters – such as what one feeds his or her family. And because the issue had not been publicly debated before, we had a clean slate to define it. The opacity of the process also ended up being positive for our side, as the public is unlikely to trust a regulatory decision made almost completely behind closed doors.

the plan

We assembled a diverse left-right-center coalition of allies to push back against the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Allies included government watchdogs, nutrition experts, agricultural workers, global warming skeptics, fitness bloggers, mommy bloggers and former legislators.

Our strategy was to raise political risk for the two regulatory agencies by elevating voices to which decision makers would be receptive. For USDA, that meant an op-ed in the Des Moines Register, the secretary of agriculture's home-state newspaper, on how his agency's actions were hurting famers. For HHS, it meant piggybacking on some of the negative coverage Secretary Kathleen Sebelius received regarding government's overreach in the health care sector. And for both, it meant grassroots and grasstops constituencies encouraging members of Congress to turn up the heat on the dietary guidelines committee on this issue.

the result

Our allies delivered our messaging through a variety of media, from earned press coverage to op-eds and commentary to talk radio to television. Outlets included Fox News, Fox Business News, The Wall Street Journal, POLITICO, The New York Post, Des Moines Register, National Review and countless others. All efforts were targeted at individual decision makers of value.

We won. While the dietary guidelines advisory committee officially recommended that the guidelines include big cuts to our client's products, that language was stripped in the final guidelines due to the amount of controversy it generated.