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From the Private Secretary

9 July, 1984

Diet and Cardiovascular Disease

The Prime Minister has seen a copy of your Secretary of State's letter of 2 July to the Lord President about the COMA Report on the relationship between diet and cardiovascular disease.

The Prime Minister has noted that your Secretary of State proposes to publish this Report on 12 July and - subject to the views of colleagues - would be content for him to do so.

The Prime Minister has commented that the Report is unlikely to be well received by the farming community, and she would be grateful if this point could be taken into account in public presentation.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of H Committee and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

DAVID BARCLAY

S. A. Godber, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security

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cc Covering letter only
to B1

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

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Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

- 1) Mr Fletcher
- 2) Prime Minister (4)

The Rt Hon The Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
Lord President of the Council
Privy Council Office
68 Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2AT

Mr Fowler proposes to
publish this report on diet
and heart disease on Thursday
2 July 1984 12 July.
Summary at flag A.

Dear Willie.

The James Wright
very pleased!

DMB
3/7

DIET AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Following concern about the levels of coronary heart disease - which are very high in the United Kingdom - the Chief Medical Officer's Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) were asked to study the relationship between diet and cardiovascular disease. They have now produced their report: a list of the main recommendations is at Annex A and a copy of the report is also enclosed. Colleagues are invited to note the basis on which I propose to publish the report following discussion - because of its significant implications for the food and agriculture industries - with colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Welsh Office, Scottish Office and Northern Ireland Office.

Among the recommendations are proposals to reduce fat intake affecting milk, butter, cheese, biscuits and meat. A substantial decrease in salt intake is commended. The report does not guarantee that an individual who makes these changes will be immune from cardiovascular disease but the message is that eating in moderation, with the modest switch in eating pattern that the report indicates, is a prudent and sensible precaution.

Over the last two years public interest in this subject has increased. There has been a report by an expert Committee of the World Health Organisation (WHO), translated into a "national diet" by an ad hoc group of nutritionists and health educators. The Government has been wrongly accused of suppressing and ignoring this work. We have defended ourselves by reference to COMA. The report must therefore be published, and as quickly as possible to avoid unnecessary speculation.

E.R.

I propose that the publication be on Thursday 12 July, announced through an inspired PQ and Press Release. The main points would be:

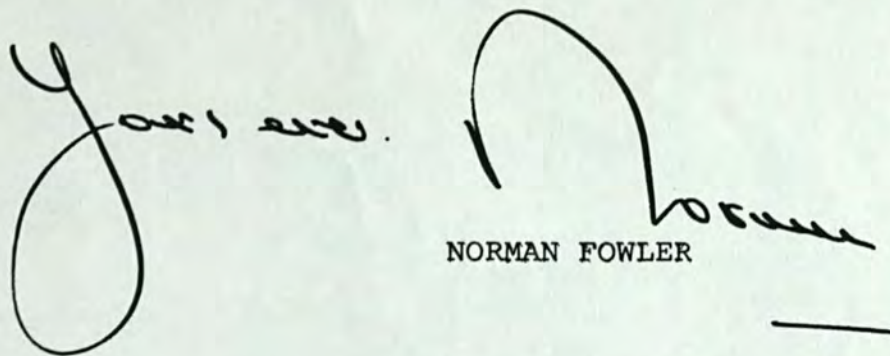
- (a) Diets are essentially for individuals to determine. To do this they need information on a good diet and information on what is in food.
- (b) DHSS will be inviting the Health Education Council and the British Nutrition Foundation to produce dietary guidance based on the COMA report, through their Joint Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education.
- (c) DHSS and MAFF would continue discussions recently begun with industry on fat content labelling.
- (d) Government would consider the wider implications for agriculture, in discussion with those concerned.

Clearly there will be claims and counter claims following publication of the report. COMA did not feel that the scientific evidence warranted going as far as the WHO Committee, and their recommendations are less stringent. It will be said that they have been influenced by Government on behalf of industry. We will be pressed for immediate statutory control on food labelling. Conversely, the food and agriculture industries may argue that the report goes beyond what the present scientific evidence can sustain. Certainly COMA recognise in their report that the evidence often does not amount to proof.

I would propose that the Chief Medical Officer plus the key COMA author should give a Press Conference on the day of publication. However, I do not think that Ministerial involvement would be appropriate.

I am copying this letter to H Committee colleagues and also to the Prime Minister.

I would be grateful to know by 10 July if colleagues are content.



NORMAN FOWLER

DIET AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Main Recommendations

GENERAL PUBLIC

1. Avoid obesity by an appropriate food intake and regular exercise
2. Don't smoke and avoid excessive alcohol intake
3. On average, reduce intake of saturated fatty acids by 25% and of total fat by 17%
4. Avoid further increases in sugar intake
5. Decrease salt intake
6. Compensate for less fat by fibre-rich carbohydrates

DOCTORS

7. Special advice on diet for people at risk of coronary heart disease
8. Doctors to be vigorous in identifying and advising people who have an increased risk of coronary heart disease

HEALTH EDUCATION

9. Inform the general public about how to construct a healthy diet and regulate physical activity

FOOD INDUSTRY

10. Labelling of fat content
11. More stringent declaration of alcohol content
12. Reduce saturated fatty acids and or common salt (as appropriate) in such products as milk, meat and meat products, cereal products and bread

FURTHER REVIEW

13. Establish joint machinery for on going review of prevention of coronary heart disease

GOVERNMENT

14. Promote health education
15. Follow up recommendations 10, 11, 12
16. Encourage production of learner sheep, cattle and pigs
17. Remove from CAP those elements which may discourage people from changing their diet

18. Cost-benefit analysis of methods for identifying those at risk of coronary heart disease and of preventive methods. Research into cheaper and simpler methods to facilitate measurement of blood lipids and blood pressure.

TWO ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF EFFECT ON AVERAGE DIET
(THESE EXAMPLES ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE REPORT)

1. Semi-skimmed milk only

Cut back: cheese to $\frac{2}{3}$
meat to $\frac{6}{7}$
butter to $\frac{1}{4}$
biscuits to $\frac{1}{2}$
salt in cooking to $\frac{4}{5}$

Increase: margarine (to replace butter)
fish
wholemeal bread

2. Semi-skimmed milk only

Substitute: $\frac{2}{3}$ fat cheese for full cream cheese
Cut back: meat to $\frac{6}{7}$
butter, margarine and other fats (spreadable,
non-spreadable and cooking) to $\frac{9}{10}$
biscuits to $\frac{1}{2}$
salt in cooking to $\frac{4}{5}$

Increase: fish
wholemeal bread