

How the Farm Bill Affects You

Sophie Kaufman
Nutrition, Beloit College, Beloit, WI

ABSTRACT

The United States government is involved in both direct food subsidies and nutrition research. The United States Department of Agriculture food pyramid recommends a certain number of daily servings of different types of food. The Farm Bill is passed by Congress and provides direct subsidies. It allocates the spending of billions of dollars from taxpayers. The bill has historically gone almost exclusively to the production of food that the Department of Agriculture does not recommend eating.

INTRODUCTION

The United States government is involved both in food and nutrition policy. The farm bill is legislation that is passed about every five years that creates the United State's agriculture policy. The creation of subsidies for farmers began as a depression stimulating program and has continued through the years. The United States Department of Agriculture also has created a food pyramid that is the leading source for nutrition information for the United States. I have investigated whether the Farm Bill subsidies are distributed to farmers in keeping with the USDA's food guidelines.

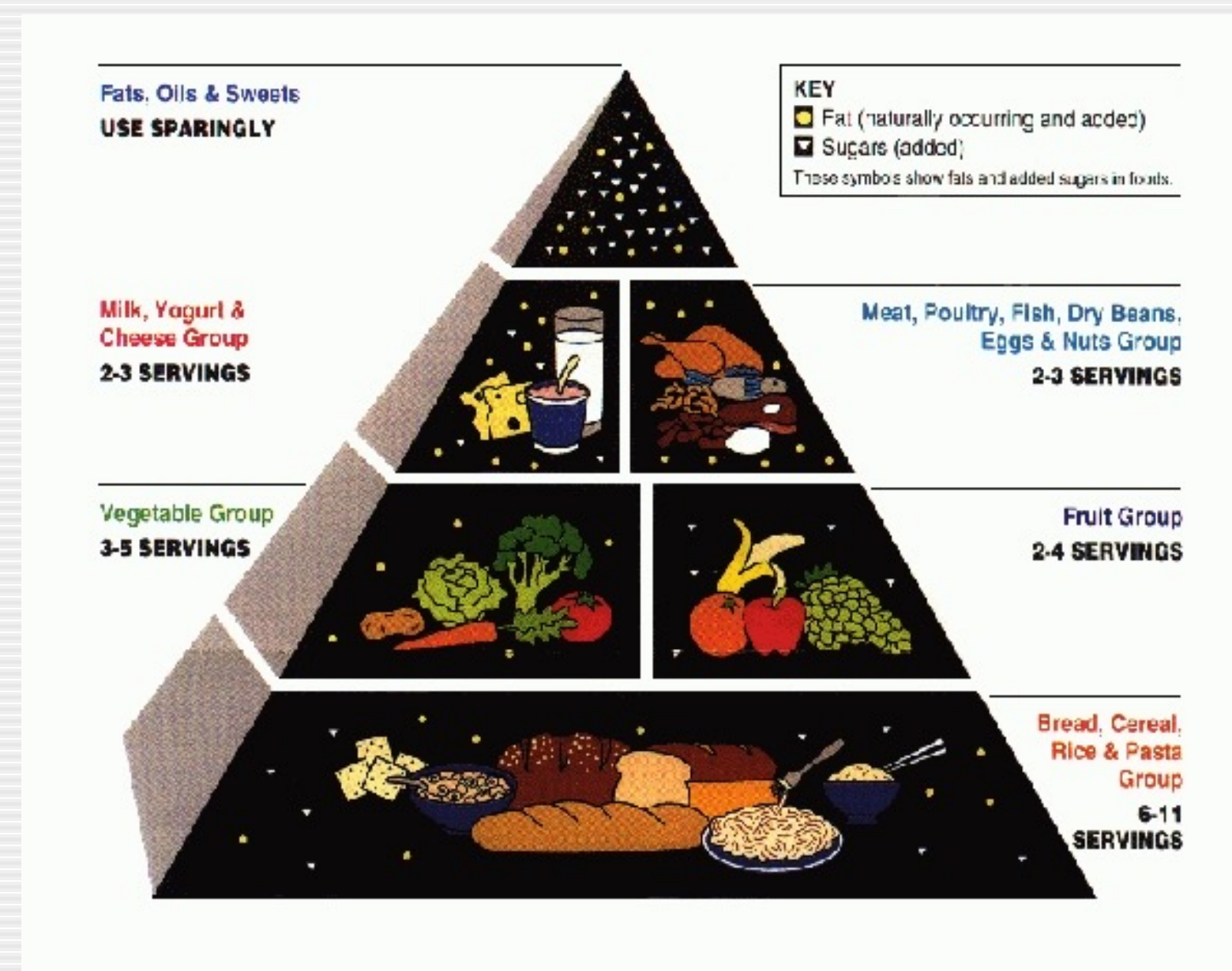


Figure 1: The most recent USDA Food Pyramid that represented serving recommendations. The food pyramid adopted in 2000 no longer illustrates serving recommendations, so the one above is often used.

METHOD

I looked at the daily requirements pyramid created by the USDA and the data on food subsidies to evaluate whether they are consistent. To get background information I read the books *The Politics of Fat* and *The Citizens Guide to the Farm Bill*. I also looked at a variety of peer-reviewed sources.

Comparing Farm Bill Crop Subsidies with USDA Food Pyramid Recommendations

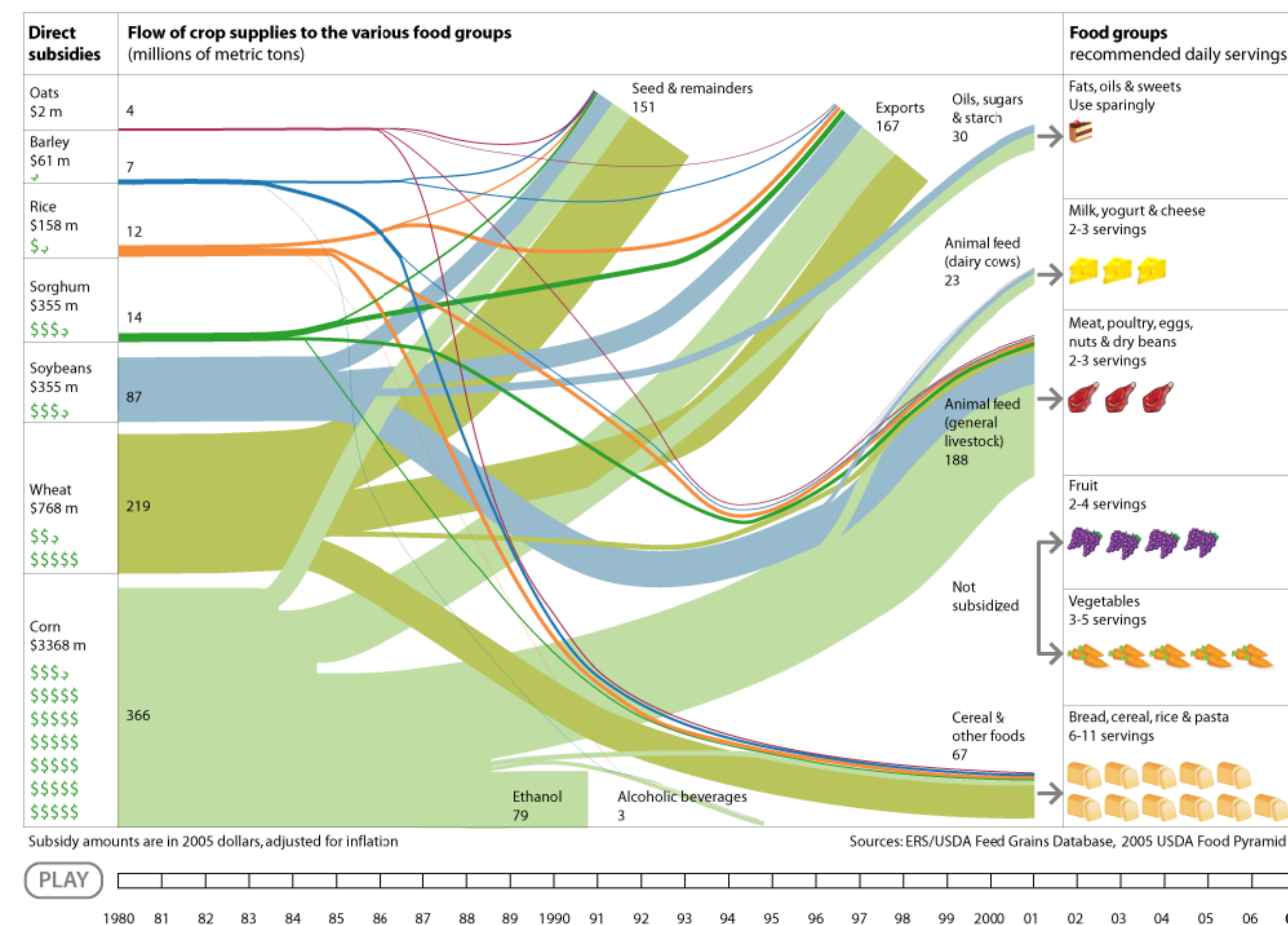


Figure 2: Farm Subsidies and the Food Pyramid. This figure shows how subsidies have changed from 1980 to the present, and how the subsidies compare with the food pyramid recommendations. For instance, at the lower right, for 11 daily servings of bread, cereal, rice and pasta, the subsidy is only a small green line compared to the line at meat, poultry and eggs where 2-3 servings are recommended.

RESULTS

Balz Frei of the Linus Pauling Institute wrote, "According to the Congressional Budget Office, of the estimated \$17 Billion in farm subsidies provided by the government in 2005, \$7.3 billion goes for corn and other feed grains (for animal meat for us to eat). Soybeans get \$1.6 billion, fed to livestock to make partially hydrogenated soybean oil, or trans fats. You have to go all the way to the bottom of the list to find \$200 million for fruits" (6). The University of California-Berkeley has composed a flow chart that clearly examines the disparities between farm subsidies and the recommendations from the USDA, as shown in Figure 2. The food icons represent the number of servings. From the chart it is clear that that fruits and vegetables are not supported financially by our government. A shortcoming of the chart is that it does not illustrate how much of the money does not even go to food production, but instead goes directly to animal feed.

DISCUSSION

Based on the information collected, it is clear that the nutrition experts who provided recommendations for the USDA food pyramid have been unsuccessful in influencing the politicians and staff in Congress who pass the Federal legislation - the Farm Bill. Instead subsidies are given to the same few crops that result in a large overproduction of same few foods. Such surplus directly effects the prices at your supermarket.

CONCLUSION: Through this data, it is clear. What the USDA recommends people to eat does not match what the US government pays farmers to grow. Our elected representatives in Congress and their staff make the decisions when writing and voting on the Farm Bill.

REFERENCES

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