

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT-ELECT BARACK OBAMA
From Sally Fallon Morell, President, the Weston A. Price Foundation

November 16, 2008

Dear Mr. Obama,

Congratulations on your recent victory in the American presidential elections. As the president-elect, you have many issues to consider as you prepare to take office.

One issue I would urge you to focus on concerns a **grave injustice** taking place in the prisons of your home state, namely, a prison diet that is slowly killing the inmates assigned to the Illinois Department of Corrections. This is a diet based largely on soy protein powder and soy flour. **As you stated on last night's 60 Minutes Program, America does not condone torture. I think you would agree that what is happening in the Illinois prisons can be described as cruel and unusual punishment.**

Soy protein and soy flour are toxic, especially in large amounts. The US Food and Drug Administration lists over 200 studies on its database showing the toxicity of soy. Numerous studies show that soy consumption leads to nutrient deficiencies, digestive disorders, endocrine disruption and thyroid problems.

Even the most ardent supporters of soy, such as Dr. Mark Messina, warn against consuming more than about 20 grams of soy protein per day. But the inmates in Illinois are getting upwards of 100 grams per day—beef and chicken by-product mixtures containing 60-70 percent soy, fake soy meats and cheese, even soy added to baked goods. The soy products are produced by Archer Daniel Midlands. The change from a diet based largely on beef to one based on soy happened in 2003, when Mr. Blagojevich began his first term as governor.

The national office of the Weston A. Price Foundation has heard **from dozens of inmates begging for help.** Almost all suffer from serious digestive disorders, such as diarrhea or painful constipation, vomiting, irritable bowel syndrome and sharp pains in the digestive tract. One reason for these problems is the high oxalic acid content of soy—no food is higher in oxalic acid than soy protein isolate, which can contain up to 630 milligrams per serving, at least six times higher than the amount found in typical diets.

Oxalic acid is associated with kidney stones, but the sharp crystal deposits can form in almost every tissue in the body--**in the heart where they can stop electrical signals;** in the

bones where they can displace bone marrow cells, leading to anemia or immune deficiency; in the brain where they can impair the transmission of signals; and in the skin where they can cause fibromyalgia.

Other problems reported by the inmates include acne, hair loss, depression, lethargy, allergies, heart arrhythmias, passing out after soy consumption, frequent infections and constant feeling of cold. Many of these are symptoms of low thyroid function. The estrogen-like compounds in soy are known to depress thyroid function.

When the prisoners seek medical treatment, they are told that soy does not cause the problems they are experiencing. Even those who vomit or pass out immediately after eating soy cannot get an order for a soy-free diet. They are told: “If the soy disagrees with you, don’t eat it. Buy food from the commissary.” And since most of the inmates cannot afford to purchase food from the commissary, they are faced with a choice of serious health problems or starvation. Several have had sections of their colons removed when a simple return to a nutritious, soy-free diet would have solved the problem. One inmate who passes out whenever he consumes soy was given a pacemaker.

Several inmates have filed lawsuits. One inmate has been subjected to illegal and life-threatening retaliatory actions as a result of his filing two lawsuits claiming inadequate medical care. Pro bono legal help is urgently needed for these cases.

According to law, prisoners are entitled to “nutritionally adequate food” (Ramos v Lamm, 639.2d 559, 1980). According to Illinois law, “Infliction of unnecessary suffering on prisoner by failure to treat his medical needs is inconsistent with contemporary standards of decency and violates the Eighth Amendment” (Key Note 7. Criminal Law 1213).

The justification for the switch from beef to soy is to save money. But according to one court case, “A lack of financing is not a defense to a failure to satisfy minimum constitutional standards in prisons” (Duran v. Anaya, 642, Supp. 510 (DNM 1986), page 525, paragraph 6).

And it is not clear that the soy diet is saving the state of Illinois any money, not when you consider the greatly increased medical costs that have ensued, and the risk to the state of costly lawsuits. The state of Virginia provides grass-fed beef to inmates at no cost to the state. Low-risk prisoners raise the beef at Sky Meadows State Park. The surplus is sold to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, resulting in a net gain for the prison budget. All over the country prisons are instituting creative ways to save money while teaching inmates new skills, including gardening, animal husbandry, beekeeping, food processing, composting and recycling. Only the state of Illinois has chosen to poison its prisoners instead.

It is said that a nation is judged on the way it treats its prisoners. The American prison system is predicated on the premise that criminals can be rehabilitated. To feed prisoners a diet that can permanently ruin their health robs them of any opportunity for rehabilitation, renders them unfit for normal life when they are released, and will impose an unnecessary burden on the state’s medical services. It constitutes a medical experiment and amounts cruel and unusual punishment, which must be stopped.

Mr. Obama, you can stop this cruel soy-feeding experiment with one phone call. I urge you to be that champion of fairness and justice that you promised during your campaign by making that call.

Sincerely yours,

Sally Fallon Morell, President
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The Weston A. Price Foundation is a non-profit nutrition education foundation dedicated to restoring nutrient-dense foods to the human diet through education, research and activism. The Foundation has spearheaded a national campaign to warn consumers about the dangers of modern soy foods. Please visit their website www.westonaprice.org to learn more about the Foundation's Soy Alert! campaign.