

# The MAHA Movement

## Key Takeaways

- In February 2025, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order creating the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission.
- On May 22, 2025, the MAHA Commission released a report indicating potential drivers of chronic diseases in children. The report, titled *The MAHA Report: Making Our Children Healthy Again*, is divided into four sections focusing on key contributors the authors believe to be the leading causes of childhood chronic disease – ultra-processed foods, chemicals in the environment, childhood behavior in the digital age, and overmedicalization.
- After the report was released, agricultural organizations from across the country quickly pointed out the lack of farmer representation and input in the development of the report.
- While this report’s purpose was to set the stage of the issue of chronic disease in children, it is expected the Commission will release another report with suggestions for policy changes in August 2025.

## Questions

1. Are you prepared to defend the safe use of crop protection products to policymakers and the public?
2. What resources do you need to be better equipped to discuss the safety of crop protection products?
3. Should TFBF have specific policy positions on the MAHA movement?
4. If so, what?

## Background

<sup>1</sup>In February of 2025, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order creating the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission. Led by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., the mission of the MAHA Commission is *“to advise and assist the President on how best to exercise his authority to address the childhood chronic disease crisis”* and to *“re-direct our national focus, in the public and private sectors, toward understanding and drastically lowering chronic disease rates and ending childhood chronic disease.”* The Commission is directed to study any potential causes of childhood chronic disease, including *“the American diet, absorption of toxic material, medical treatments, lifestyle, environmental*

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<sup>1</sup>Direct quotes from the MAHA report and other comments and statements are notated by italics and do not reflect the position of Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation.

<sup>2</sup>*factors, government policies, food production techniques, electromagnetic radiation, and corporate influence or cronyism.”*

With these directives, the Commission was charged with submitting an assessment to President Trump. Members of the MAHA Commission include:

- Vincent Haley, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy – Executive Director
- Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Agriculture
- Scott Turner, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
- Linda McMahon, Secretary of Education
- Douglas Collins, Secretary of Veterans Affairs
- Lee Zeldin, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency
- Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- Stephen Miller, Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy
- Dr. Kevin Hassett, Director of the National Economic Council
- Dr. Stephen Miran, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers
- Michael Kratsios, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy
- Dr. Martin Makary, Commissioner of Food and Drugs
- Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya, Director of the National Institutes of Health

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### **The Shift to Ultra-Processed Foods**

Although recognizing there is no universal definition, the first section of the MAHA report vaguely defines Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs) as *“packaged and ready-to-consume products that are*

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View the MAHA Report:



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*formulated for shelf life and/or palatability but are typically high in added sugars, refined grains, unhealthy fats, and sodium and low in fiber and essential nutrients.”* It cites nearly 70% of an American child’s calories come from UPFs and attributes this to the *“corporatization and consolidation”* of the food system following World War II. Three main reasons UPFs should be of concern in a child’s diet are identified – nutrient depletion, increased caloric intake, and inclusion of food additives. First, the report focuses on the replacement of nutrient-dense whole foods with three *“engineered components”* – ultra-processed grains, sugars, and fats – resulting in a reduction in consumption of essential vitamins, minerals, fiber,<sup>3</sup> and other nutrients. More specifically, animal-based fats like butter and lard over seed oils such as soybean, corn, canola, and others are prioritized for their health benefits. Multiple food additives are linked to increased risks of mental disorders, ADHD, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome and even carcinogenic effects. The report focuses on food dyes, titanium dioxide, propylparaben, butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), and artificial sweeteners as the most problematic food additives in UPFs. As a solution to UPF consumption, the report highlights multiple whole food sources containing important nutrients, including beef, whole milk and other dairy products, leafy greens, fish, legumes, nuts, and other fruits and vegetables. These are highlighted for being rich in nutrients such as calcium, iron, potassium, vitamin D, magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, and others.

### **The Cumulative Load of Chemicals in Our Environment**

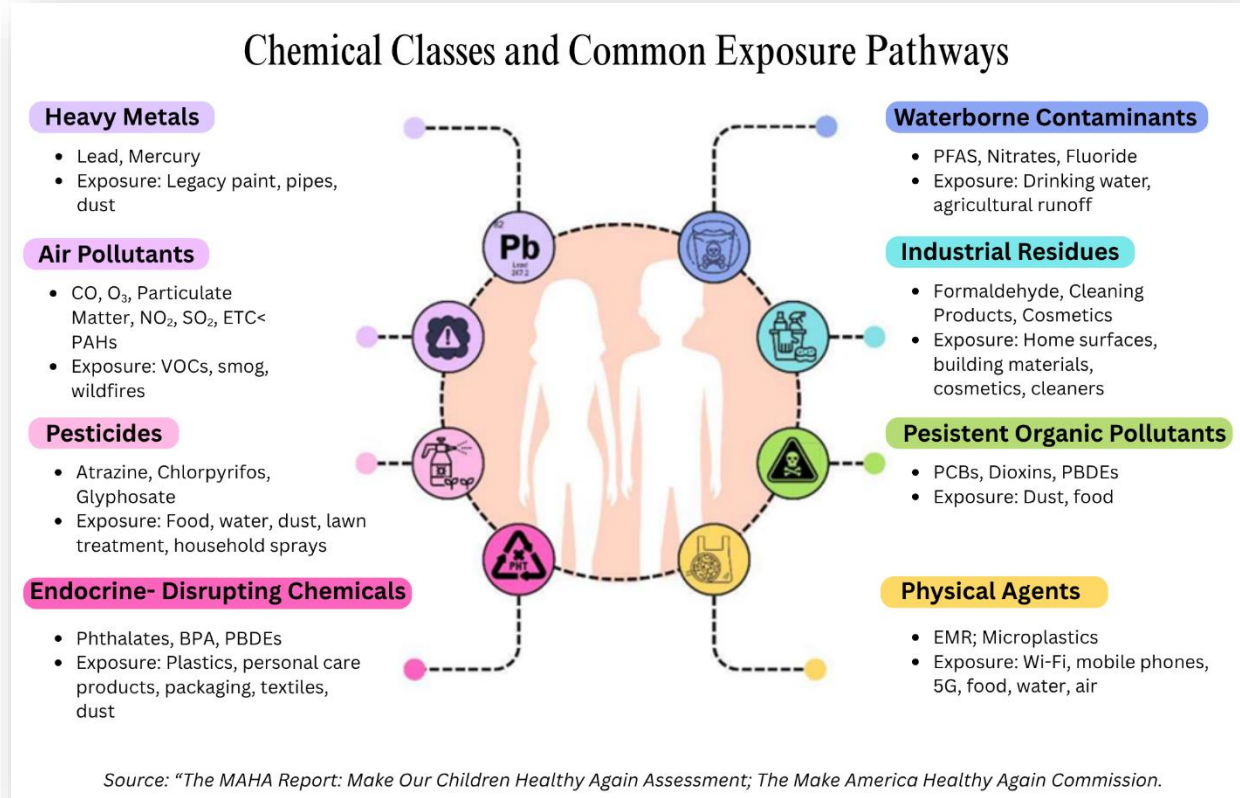
The second section of the MAHA report outlines the existence of a mixture of chemicals in the environment children are exposed to. The report claims not enough research has been done on the effects of a cumulative load of exposures from different *“environmental chemicals”*, including per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), microplastics, fluoride, electromagnetic radiation, phthalates, bisphenols, and even pesticides.

While saying human health assessments are limited, pesticide exposure – specifically naming glyphosate and atrazine – is linked to multiple health effects such as reproductive and developmental disorders, cancers, liver inflammation, endocrine disruption, and birth defects. The report also recognizes the high compliance rate of pesticides with EPA’s safety standards and the lack of direct links to human health risks when these products are used in accordance with their approved labels. However, EPA’s Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) regulatory process is questioned, citing these high FIFRA compliance rates while also discussing other studies finding high concentrations of pesticide residues in commonplace and other safety concerns. When discussing research related to pesticide safety and regulations about pesticide enforcement, the report indicates undue bias by targeting the influence of

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pesticide manufacturers in industry-funded research and lobbying efforts.



#### **<sup>4</sup>The Crisis of Childhood Behavior in the Digital Age**

The third section of the report focuses on the impacts of changes in physical activity, mental health, chronic stress, and social media use on children. This section points out multiple causes – including reduced recess and in-school activities, increased screen time and social media usage, lack of quality sleep, loneliness, and changes in family dynamics – presumably resulting in increased cases of ADHD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions in children. Significant emphasis is placed on a child’s increased use of technology at a young age, highlighting effects on sleep, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

#### **The Overmedicalization of Kids**

Section three ends suggesting in the event to address behavioral and other medical challenges, children are being over diagnosed leading to overmedicalization. Section four starts by reporting the increase in use of prescription medications such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, antibiotics, asthma medication, GLP-1 drugs, and others. The over-use of these types of medications is linked to numerous health risks and longer-term health concerns.

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Similarly, vaccine use in children is questioned, suggesting the safety of a complex vaccination system in children and its link to chronic disease is not fully understood and has not been properly studied. This section compares vaccine schedules in children in European countries to the United States, emphasizing other countries using less than half as many vaccinations and not having school vaccination mandates. While major emphasis is put on vaccine use, the report does not mention animal vaccine use at all.

### **Corporate Capture**

Throughout the entire report, the Commission emphasizes the need for more reliable science and increased studies into the four major focus areas for chronic childhood disease. Peer-reviewed studies, individual research, and industry-wide statistics are used multiple times to<sup>5</sup> set the stage for the four focus areas for childhood chronic disease and why the public should be concerned about them. However, in the final section, the Commission inserts the notion industry interests, termed “*corporate capture*”, are overinfluencing “*scientific literature, legislative actions, academic institutions, regulatory agencies, medical journals, physician organizations, clinical guidelines, and the news media*”. Most concerning, the massive amounts of peer-reviewed science used to validate the safety and efficacy of modern agricultural technology like crop protection products are seen by the Commission as “*ineffective and biased*”, stating “*reviewers at top [scientific] journals are untrained, ineffective when tested, and many have financial ties to drug companies*”. The Commission also insinuates advocacy groups and lobbying efforts are unduly influenced by large corporations and do not represent the best interests of the average American citizen.

### **Post-Report Response from the Agricultural Community**

When talking about crop protection products, the Commission explicitly highlights the importance of involving the agricultural community when making decisions about the United States food system. The report says:

*“Importantly, the Executive Order establishing the MAHA Commission directed the involved agencies to work with farmers to ensure that United States food is the healthiest, most abundant, and most affordable in the world. American farmers are critical partners in the success of the Make America Healthy Again agenda. All the involved agencies are therefore committed to ensuring not just the survival, but the prosperity, of American Farmers. American farmers rely on these products, and actions that further regulate or restrict crop protection tools beyond risk-based and scientific processes set forth by Congress must involve thoughtful consideration of what is necessary for adequate protection, alternatives, and cost of production. Precipitous changes in agricultural practices could have an adverse impact on American agriculture and the domestic and global food supply. The federal government will continue to regularly review the safety of these important crop protection tools.”*

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Leading up to its release, Farm Bureau and other agricultural organizations pushed to participate in discussions with key contributors of the report and were not involved. After the report was released, agricultural organizations from across the country quickly pointed out the lack of farmer representation and input in the development of the report. In his statement, American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall criticized the Commission. He said:

*“It is deeply troubling for the White House to endorse a report that sows seeds of doubt and fear about our food system and farming practices, then attempts to celebrate farmers and the critical role they play in producing the safest food supply in the world. Farmers are identified as ‘critical partners,’ yet were excluded from the development of the report, despite many requests for a seat at the table. The report also expresses a desire to ensure farmers continue to thrive, <sup>6</sup>but undermining confidence in our food system directly contradicts that noble goal. The report spotlights outlier studies and presents unproven theories that feed a false narrative and only then does it acknowledge a mountain of evidence about the safety of our food system. We suspect USDA had a prominent role in the report’s recognition that farmers are the critical first step in the food system, but as a whole, the report falls short. The American people were promised transparency yet presented with a report developed in secret.”*

While this report’s purpose was to set the stage of the issue of chronic disease in children, it is expected the Commission will release another report with suggestions for policy changes in August 2025. Agricultural organizations, including Farm Bureau, have been meeting with MAHA Commission members and other White House officials, including a meeting with President Trump, throughout the summer to provide input in preparation for the upcoming policy recommendations.

## **Policy**

### *Tennessee Farm Bureau Government Regulations (Partial)*

Excessive government regulations strangle the productive capacity of our nation and waste our resources. Government agencies often make rules and regulations by administrative decree. Unfortunately, regulations by different agencies of government frequently conflict. All rules published in the Federal Register should undergo Congressional review and approval before final implementation. Too often, elected representatives relinquish their decision-making responsibilities to regulators or designated boards. The United States Supreme Court’s ruling to overturn *Chevron* deference in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* restored the federal government’s balance of power and recognized the ever-growing number of burdensome regulations administered by federal agencies. Farm Bureau must continue to work with all branches of government and keep each accountable to fulfill their constitutional roles.

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As regulatory agencies become more involved in controlling agricultural production practices, Farm Bureau should insist on a fair representation of agricultural production and land ownership. We encourage better communication among regulators and producers.

### *Food Safety (Partial)*

America's food supply is the safest, highest quality, most abundant, and most affordable in the world. Farmers recognize a safe food supply is important to the integrity of the agricultural industry but most importantly to the well-being and health of the consumer.

With changing technology, the process of maintaining a safe product from the field to the table can always be improved. Policies and procedures that build trust and reliability in agriculture should reflect the latest in technology and research. Regulatory oversight should not impede farmers' ability to produce. The risks versus the benefits should be considered in any food safety legislation or regulatory proposals. On-farm authority of government agencies should not be expanded. Quality assurance programs, research from agricultural colleges, and education of food handlers throughout the food supply chain should take priority over expansion of the regulatory process. Increased costs to producers from on-farm inspections and standards should be a last resort of any legislative or regulatory initiative to improve food safety.

### *Animal Welfare (Partial)*

Livestock producers continually strive to keep their animals healthy through robust biosecurity, vaccination, and treatment programs. We support the advancement of properly researched and industry-tested animal health technologies to enable farmers to improve the care and management of their livestock and combat emerging diseases.

### *Crop Protection (Partial)*

We support legislation limiting authority for pesticide regulation solely to federal and state governments.

We oppose any regulations requiring a permit before application of a crop protection product. We oppose curtailment of the proper use of crop protection products, unless further research and scientific data detect injury to health and well-being would result.

We urge Congress to provide greater oversight of EPA's review of crop protection products. EPA must be held accountable to make timely, science-based decisions and not bow under pressure from activist groups. We oppose any legal action based on excessively broad interpretations of environmental laws which restrict or limit the safe and proper use of agricultural crop protection products. Products which have undergone proper approval processes under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) should be protected from frivolous lawsuits making unsubstantiated health claims.

### *Health and Medical (Partial)*

Tennessee's childhood obesity and diabetes rates are alarmingly high, causing health concerns and increased healthcare costs. We encourage Farm Bureau to continue to educate Tennesseans, particularly youth, on the health benefits of maintaining a healthy weight.

Over the past 50 years, fluoridation of community drinking water has been a major factor responsible for the decline in tooth decay. Water fluoridation remains the most equitable and cost-effective method of delivering fluoride to all members of most communities, regardless of age, educational experience, or income levels.

Prescription drugs are an expensive component of health insurance. Among all the states, Tennessee has one of the highest per-capita prescription drug use rates and has experienced the greatest increase in the use of prescription painkiller drugs.

### *Agricultural Research (Partial)*

Public research institutions must remember their purpose is to serve the public interest. Privately funded grants should be accepted only in cases where the public service function of the institution will not be compromised. Patents or copyrights developed through research at public institutions should remain the property of the institution and be managed as public assets. Grants of exclusive rights to such patents should be made with great care and with the public interest in mind.

### *American Farm Bureau*

#### *110 / Regulatory Review and Reform (Partial)*

9. Regulations, including guidance documents, that affect farmers should only be adopted after appropriate public notice and comment.

12. We support:

12.7. Meaningful stakeholder representation by affected sectors on regulatory boards and commissions as well as a willingness to override unacceptable agency actions;

13. We oppose:

13.3. Any consumer agency or council having any federal authority other than advisory powers;

13.4. Federal regulations on generally accepted agricultural practices;

#### *160 / Nutrition (Partial)*

1. We support:

1.2. Recognition by USDA and the Food and Drug Administration of studies and research in nutrition which are based on published standard research criteria whether funded by producer groups or other recognized research groups;

2. We oppose:

2.1. Anyone dictating which foods should and should not be eaten, including imposing “health taxes” on food and beverages; and

2.2. Using taxpayers’ money for the purpose of legislating or controlling the diets of American people.

### *336 / Agricultural Chemicals (Partial)*

1. Agricultural chemicals are important in continuing to supply consumers with an abundant, safe, nutritious, high quality and reasonably priced food supply. We are committed to continuing the use of agricultural chemicals in a safe and judicious manner so as to protect the health and safety of producers, our employees, our families, our communities, and the environment.

8. Regulation

8.1. We believe implementation and defense of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) should be based on credible scientific information in order to benefit farmers, the environment, and the public and should be the sole federal regulatory authority over pesticides.

8.2. There must be clear guidelines for how EPA determines if data is credible, verifiable, timely, and science-based.

8.17. All approved agricultural chemicals, such as atrazine, acetachlor, glyphosate, diuron and simazine, are safe when used according to label and effective, economical crop protection chemicals that must continue to be available to farmers.

### *461 / Research (Partial)*

1. The food and agriculture research, extension, and education system must support, build, and maintain a critical mass of well-trained scientists in the public sector to ensure that the U.S. remains the leader in global agricultural production. An effective and efficient transfer of knowledge and technology for the benefit of agriculture producers and consumers worldwide must be maintained and remain a high priority in future budgets.

2. We support:

2.1. Ongoing efforts to elevate food, agricultural, and natural resources research as a national priority, including partnering with a broad coalition of stakeholders to develop

and deliver a unified message calling for moving agricultural research to the forefront of American Science.

2.2. Strengthening investments across the board in the U.S. food, agricultural, and natural resources research portfolio, including competitive grants, federal and state capacity funding, and additional public-private partnerships.

2.3. A commitment for increased investment across all federal agencies with significant roles in addressing critical priorities in food, agriculture, and natural resources through research.

2.6. Streamlining the process for more direct funding by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to land grant universities directed toward production agriculture and mechanization research.

2.14. Federal investment in research that provides a mix of formula, competitive, and special grants and reauthorization of the competitive research facilities program for land grant universities.

2.25. Public, objective research and reporting of results without private company review, oversight, or other influence.

#### *462 / Role of USDA (Partial)*

1. Agriculture should remain the primary responsibility of USDA. Food and fiber consumers will be better served by healthy, profitable production agriculture than by consumer advocacy within USDA.

16. USDA should be:

16.1. A monitor of domestic and foreign agricultural affairs;

16.2. An accurate source of agricultural data and research; and,

16.3. An agricultural policy adviser to other departments of the federal government.

18. USDA should:

18.16. Appoint one or more farmers on any agriculturally related government board.