

Articles 

## Times Food Writer Mark Bittman Wants Big Government to 'Fix' Your Diet with Higher Taxes

By: Clay Waters

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New York Times food writer (and food scold) Mark Bittman made the front of the Sunday Review with his latest modest proposal, the 2,100-word "[Bad Food? Tax It.](#)"

(In a [March 29 column](#), Bittman self-righteously announced a fast on behalf of the poor against proposed G.O.P. budget cuts: "These supposedly deficit-reducing cuts -- they'd barely make a dent -- **will quite literally cause more people to starve to death**, go to bed hungry or live more miserably than are doing so now.")



Bittman's latest melodramatic bid as head of the food police involves raising taxes to change poor people's eating habits to save "**tens of millions of lives**" and "**tens if not hundreds of billions of dollars in health care costs.**"

Yet the food industry appears incapable of marketing healthier foods. And whether its leaders are confused or just stalling doesn't matter, because the fixes are not really their problem. Their mission is not public health but profit, so they'll continue to sell the health-damaging food that's most profitable, until the market or another force skews things otherwise. **That "other force" should be the federal government, fulfilling its role as an agent of the public good and establishing a bold national fix.**

His solution? "Tax things like soda, French fries, doughnuts and hyperprocessed snacks." The full-spread article is beefed up with lots of charts and graphics on the wonders of what "a small federal tax could do."

This program would, of course, upset the processed food industry. Oh well. It would also bug those who might resent paying more for soda and chips and argue that their right to eat whatever they wanted was being breached. **But public health is the role of the government, and our diet is right up there with any other public responsibility you can name, from water treatment to mass transit.**

Bittman cavalierly dismissed freedom arguments:

Forcing sales of junk food down through taxes isn't ideal. First off, we'll have to listen to nanny-state arguments, which can be countered by the acceptance of the anti-tobacco movement as well as a dozen other successful public health measures...

Besides the objectionable use of government power to regulate people's eating habits, there is little evidence such a program would even work. A 2010 [Cato Institute study](#) found no evidence linking soda consumption to obesity, and found that "fat taxes" are ineffective, even counterproductive, when it comes to actually reducing snack consumption.

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