

"They say our land is not productive because we don't sell anything from it. We use it to survive and live a healthy life."

BARTOLO GONZÁLES



Don Bartolo Gonzalez directs the collection of alfalfa in San Salvador Atenco, the proposed site for the new Mexico City airport.

Mexico airport plan is running into flak

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capital and with only one regularly operating runway, is choked with air traffic and hemmed in by urban sprawl.

The federal government says Sánchez and some 4,000 families have to go, but they refuse.

They say the compensation offered by the federal government is not enough. They don't trust promises of jobs and relocations.

"What will I do? Become a beggar?" Sánchez said. "They told us they would give us jobs at the airport. I'm old. Do you really think they'd hire me? That's a funny one."

Critics, farmers, environmentalists and political parties have formed a powerful front against the new airport and have managed, for now, to freeze its progress, saying construction would violate constitutional law.

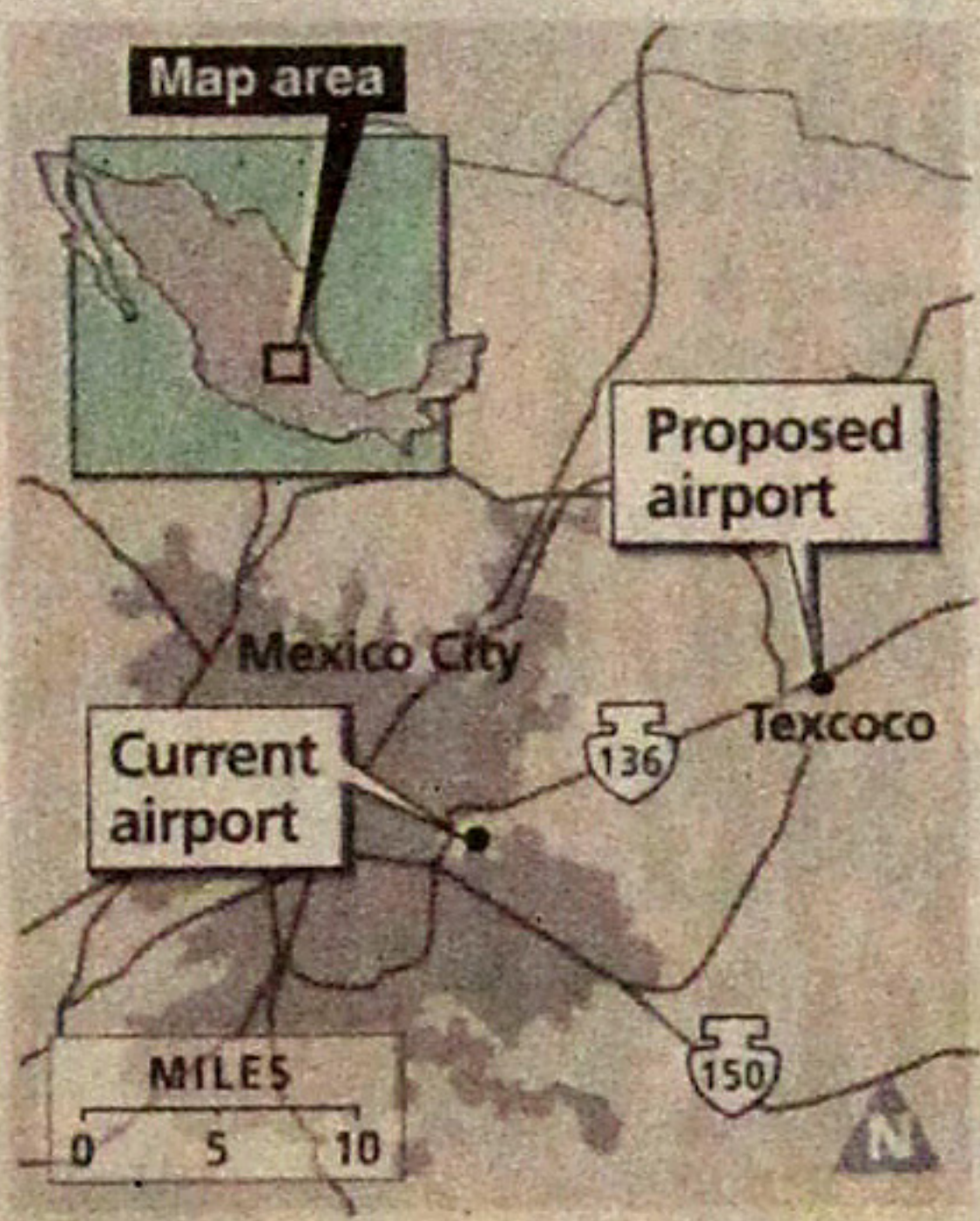
A municipal judge is reviewing the case before the federal Supreme Court takes it up.

Because the rich and powerful usually win such battles in Mexico, most doubt they can defeat the project, which has the support of President Vicente Fox, who announced Oct. 22 that Texcoco was the most feasible site for the airport.

It's Fox's biggest infrastructure project, and would be the largest in Latin America. The government, which has studied and debated the issue for nearly 30 years, says the new airport would link the country to the rest of the world.

Texcoco was chosen over the town of Tizayuca, in Hidalgo state, where officials said it would be more expensive and too far away — 44 miles from Mexico City — and would only support a maximum of four runways, instead of Texcoco's proposed six.

"If we had decided on Tizayuca, we still would have to expropriate land. There's no airport in the world, at least in Mexico, that hasn't been built



ROBERT ZAVALA/STAFF

without expropriations," Fox said, noting the project will create 80,000 jobs.

"Thousands of people in Texcoco won the lottery," he said. "Can you imagine what that means — the development impact it will have for Mexico City? More tourists, businessmen, will come to Mexico because there will be more flights."

But that's what many residents here don't want — more noise, pollution or industrial growth.

On Nov. 29, thousands of farmers set off fireworks and wielded shiny machetes in a march to the capital to protest the planned airport site.

"This land is a patrimony of the country. For my family, it is an inheritance that represents our free life," said farmer Melquiades Reyes, 34, from a ranch called Paradise.

Fox said new agricultural land would be found for those who want to continue farming.

"On the one hand, we talk about how farmers aren't surviving," Fox said. "And now, these farmers complain they will lose their patrimony and income source. Some families practically live in huts or humble homes, but they will have better homes. Today, productive activity must be sustainable."

Fox's vision is almost incomprehensible to many here.

"They say our land is not productive because we don't sell anything from it. We use it to survive and live a healthy life," said Bartolo González, 64, raking green alfalfa while his grandchildren chased white egrets. "Look at this beautiful alfalfa. Tonight I will feed the cows and we'll have the best milk."

"The land belongs to those who work it," said José Luis Robles, a Texcoco grocery store owner. "We are mad and sad at the same time. This valley is sacred."

Others object to the proposed airport site for environmental reasons.

Mexico City Mayor Manuel López Obrador, of the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party, argues the area plays a critical role in flood control. Paving it would make the capital's metroplex, home to 30 million, vulnerable to flooding.

The region also teems with thousands of migratory birds, ducks and aquatic fowl from the United States and Canada.

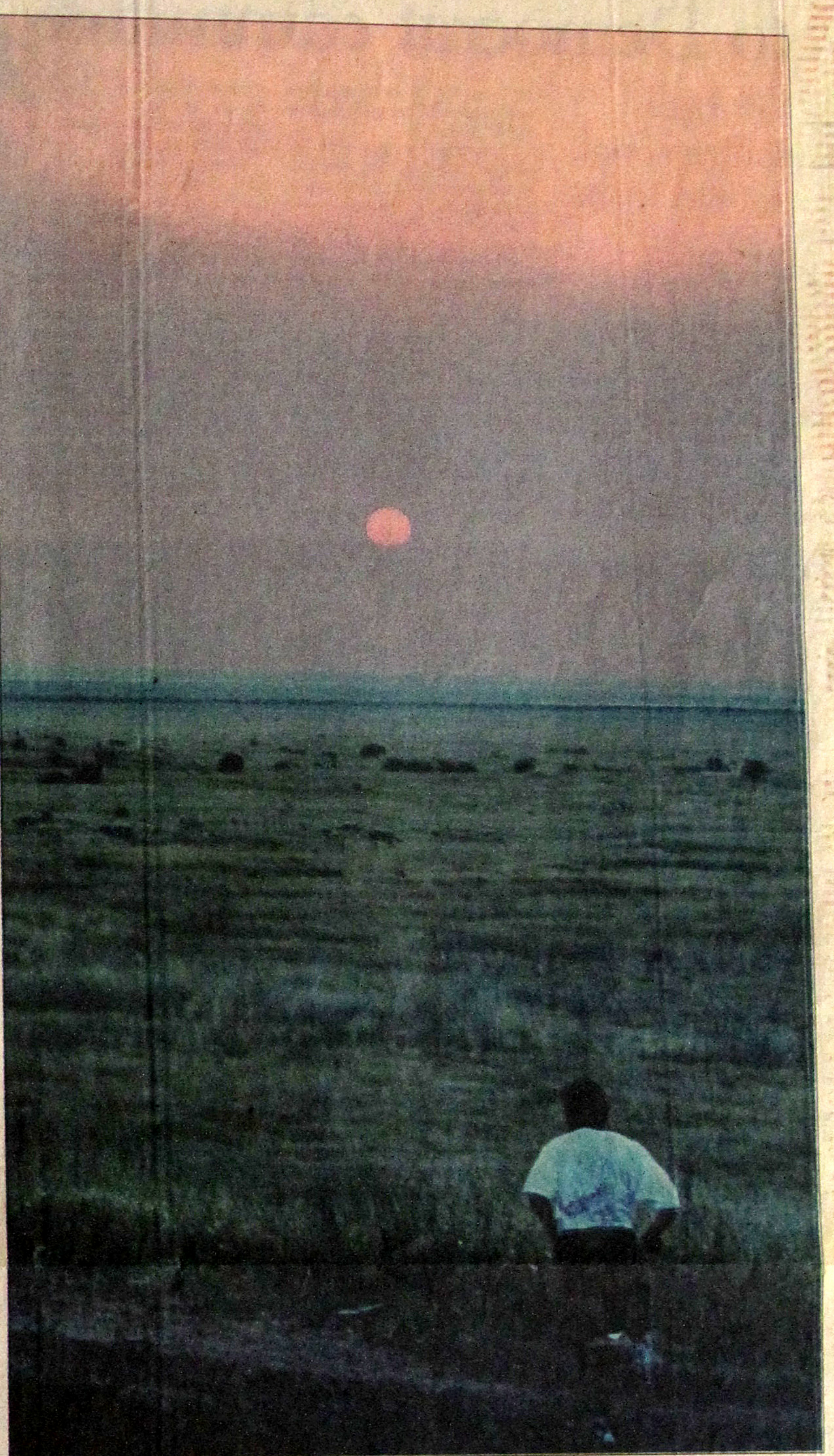
A walk through this vast panorama offers a glimpse of the geological challenges the government faces to build the project.

In some areas, the saline soil is so mushy it wiggles like gelatin. A three-mile fault line runs through it, and the active Popocatepetl volcano is 30 miles northeast, often covering Texcoco with ash and molten rocks.

Environmentalists also worry that destruction of the habitat would endanger dozens of species of birds, tens of thousands of which winter at Lake Texcoco.

"Many of these bird species, especially aquatic birds, are already in danger of extinction, and some would disappear instantly," said Patricia Escalante, national bird curator at the Institute of Biology at Mexico's National Autonomous University.

"The Valley of Mexico is one



PHOTOS BY JANET SCHWARTZ/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Melquiades Reyes runs through San Salvador Atenco. Environmentalists worry that a planned airport would endanger the area's birds.

of the most important migratory routes, it is their ancestral habitat. To pretend there won't be problems is naïve. The site is internationally important."

There also are concerns that birds will cause airline accidents.

The project is backed by many of the country's rich conglomerates. The site also was recommended by the Mitre Corp., a U.S. technology organization that works for the U.S. Defense Department, Federal Aviation Administration, Internal Revenue Service and Air Force.

Mexico's Pilots Association, the Aeronautical Engineers Association, Traffic Controllers Air Association and the Air Transport National Chamber

also back Texcoco.

Environmental groups recently traveled to Washington to meet with the Sierra Club, Audubon Society and other preservation groups.

Led by prominent Mexican author Homero Aridjis, founder and president of the Group of 100, an international environmental organization of writers, artists, and scientists, they said the airport violates environmental accords of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"The construction of the airport would be a great lack of respect for the ecology by a NAFTA country," Aridjis said.

Mexico state governor Arturo Montiel disputes environmental concerns. He says technology

and good design will mitigate the airport's impact on the land. An irrigation system, two artificial lakes, a water treatment plant, sanitary landfills, bridges, highways and an ecological park will be built, he said.

"The countryside should not be synonymous with poverty, it should be synonymous with productivity," Montiel said Dec. 3 during a meeting with farm leaders.

Adds Fox, "If we only listened to ecologists — who want a Mexico without industry, highways, streets, or water usage — what will 100 million Mexicans live, eat and make money from?"

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American Diabetes Association issues new guidelines

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needs.

"We are continuing to try to lessen the burden for patients with diabetes," Dr. Nathaniel Clark, director of the association, said in an interview.

Dr. Judith Fradkin, director of the diabetes division at the National Institutes of Health, praised the new guidelines as "well thought through."

"A lot of people have misconceptions about diabetes and dieting," Fradkin said. "Some people think sugar is the absolute worst thing for diabetics and that leads to a lot of problems such as diets that are extremely high in fat or protein."

The report emphasizes there is no one diet for everyone with diabetes. Rather, dietary plans must be individualized, usually with the aid of a dietitian, to accommodate preferences, circumstances and medical factors, like the need to lose weight or lower blood cholesterol or blood pressure, said Dr.

"Some people think sugar is the absolute worst thing for diabetics and that leads to a lot of problems such as diets that are extremely high in fat or protein."

DR. JUDITH FRADKIN
National Institutes of Health

Christopher Saudek, president of the association and an endocrinologist specializing in diabetes at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore.

Saudek said Medicare was considering covering medical nutrition therapy, and that other insurers were likely to follow its lead.

The guidelines disregard consideration of a food's "glycemic index" — how much a carbohydrate-containing food raises blood sugar when eaten alone. The glycemic index of a baked potato, for example, is the same as that of a Mars bar; when eaten alone, both result in a precipitous rise in blood sugar.

Knowledge of this ranking has prompted some people with diabetes either to quit eating potatoes or to start eating candy, forgetting that how these foods usually are consumed can have very different effects on blood sugar.

While between-meal snacking on a candy bar may have the same effect on blood sugar as would snacking on a plain potato, rarely is a potato eaten that way.

The new guidelines, which are in the January issue of Diabetes Care, say studies found no significant differences in blood sugar response to sugary or starchy foods as long as the to-

Types of the disease

■ Of the 16 million Americans with diabetes, about 1 million have Type 1, once called juvenile diabetes. The pancreas' insulin-producing cells fail, necessitating injections of this vital hormone one or more times a day so blood sugar can be used by cells instead of accumulating in the blood and spilling into the urine. The appearance of type 1 diabetes is suspected to follow exposure to an 'environmental trigger,' such as an unidentified virus, stimulating an immune attack against the beta cells of the pancreas (that produce insulin) in some genetically predisposed people, according to the Centers for Dis-

ease Control and Prevention.

■ About 15 million people have Type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes. Cells that need blood sugar are resistant to the effects of insulin. Studies have shown that insulin resistance most often results from excess weight and obesity. The CDC says 61 percent of Americans are overweight and 23 percent are obese. Incidence of Type 2 diabetes has risen 33 percent since 1990 with 10 million Americans at high risk of developing it. This year nearly 800,000 cases of diabetes will be diagnosed. The disease claims 187,000 lives a year.

tal amount of carbohydrates was similar.

However, Saudek cautioned it can be difficult to calculate the amount of carbohydrates in some foods. The guidelines note many factors can influence a food's effect on blood sugar, in-

cluding the type of sugar and starch it contains, how it is processed, whether it is cooked, and so on.

The report does condone the use of the four non-nutritive sweeteners approved for use in the United States — saccharin,

aspartame, acesulfame potassium and sucralose. But it cautions against using added fructose, a caloric sweetener that has a lesser effect than sucrose on blood sugar, since fructose can raise levels of fats in the blood.

The goal in treating diabetes is to keep blood sugar levels as stable as possible all the time since high blood sugar levels increase the risk of complications like heart attacks, strokes, kidney damage, nerve and blood vessel damage that can result in amputations or loss of vision.

To aid in blood sugar control, the association has added a recommendation: exercise. Not only does moderate exercise lower blood sugar, thus reducing insulin requirements for people with type 1, or insulin-dependent, diabetes, but it also is a vital element in permanent weight control for the millions of people whose diabetes is caused by overweight or obesity.