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Proceedings of the Workshop on Prevention and Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council Countries

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The Workshop on Prevention and Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council Countries was held in Kuwait from 30 June to 2 July 1996. It was organized by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East in cooperation with the Arab Nutrition Society and the Kuwait Nutrition Council. Over 20 participants from the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were invited to attend the workshop in their personal capacities. In addition, representatives from the private sector (Kellogg Company, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd and Nestlé) and a non-governmental organization (the British Nutrition Foundation) attended the workshop.

During the past three decades, the nutritional status of the populations of the Arab countries of the Gulf has improved. However, micronutrient deficiencies have been a longstanding food-related public health problem, which is spread among different population groups. The prevalence of a particular deficiency can vary considerably among different geographic locations and socio-economic groups.

The papers described in these proceedings show that the lack of adequate amounts of iron, iodine and vitamin D in the foods consumed is of special importance because these deficiencies have serious health consequences, wide geographic distribution and implications for economic stagnation. Other micronutrient deficiencies may occur, but they have not yet been investigated.

Micronutrient deficiencies in the Arab countries of the Gulf result primarily from inadequate intake of foods containing essential micronutrients and from impaired utilization, which is often associated with infections that can reduce the absorption of micronutrients and increase their metabolic consumption. Micronutrient deficiencies have a negative impact on society because they reduce working capacity, cause mental and growth retardation, reduce resistance to disease and may lead to mortality among women during pregnancy and childbirth.

The recommendations of the group call on countries to formulate and implement programmes to correct micronutrient deficiencies and to prevent their occurrence through sustainable food-based approaches that encourage dietary diversification, production and consumption of micronutrient-rich foods, food fortification and nutrition education for the public.

The publication is available free of charge from the FAO Regional Office for the Near East, PO Box 2223, Cairo, Egypt.

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The state of food and nutrition in the Near East countries

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Raising the levels of nutrition and standards of living of the people under the respective jurisdictions of member countries is one of the main purposes underlined in the Preamble of the FAO Constitution. An important task of FAO is to work closely with its member countries in collecting, analysing and disseminating information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture, with a view to spreading appropriate knowledge on agricultural production, food availability and other socio-economic and cultural variables.

This publication provides a succinct summary of the food and nutrition situation as well as the extent, magnitude and causes of food and nutrition problems in the countries of the Near East Region. The analysis of the food and nutrition situation takes into consideration socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors. The information and figures provided in the publication could be put to various uses, including conduct of comparative analyses, review of past trends, assessment of the present situation and identification of actions needed to achieve nutritional well-being.

The contents of the publication will be updated in the future, in light of the progress achieved and comments received. Copies can be obtained free of charge from the FAO Regional Office for the Near East, PO Box 2223, Cairo, Egypt.

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