codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Agenda Item 2b) **CX/FL 07/35/3-Add.2**

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING

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MATTERS REFERRED BY FAO AND WHO

The following information is presented to the Committee at the request of WHO.

WHO European Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity: Diet and physical activity for health, Istanbul, Turkey, 15 - 17 November 2006

The WHO European Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity was held in Istanbul, Turkey from 15 to 17 November 2006. The Conference was attended by forty-eight countries with high level delegations from health, agriculture, transport, education, finance. The European Commission was represented by the EC Commissioner for Health and Consumers' Affairs and several international organizations were present, as well as experts and nongovernmental organizations. The Conference was hosted by the Turkish government, who was represented at its highest level, with the Minister of health, the Prime Minister and several other Ministers.

The main aim of the Conference was to raise awareness and high-level commitment to action against obesity, placing it high on the political agenda in the European Region and creating a favourable political climate for addressing the public health challenge. On 16 November 2006, the Ministers of Health of the WHO European Region signed a European Charter on Counteracting Obesity.

The Conference and the preparatory process leading up to it provided the opportunity to strengthen and consolidate evidence-based multisectoral policies, and to promote national action and international collaboration. The Conference reviewed the challenge faced by obesity in the European Region, including the social and economic determinants, priority focus (children and adolescents and people of lower socioeconomic status), cost and benefits of effective multisectoral action.

Obesity is a growing epidemic that is putting increasing pressure on the health system and is challenging economies and development. One third of the school age children in the European Region are already overweight or obese and this proportion is escalating at the rate of 1 - 2% per year. The epidemic is the result of changing social, economic, cultural and physical environment and the solution is therefore complex.

Actions to counteract obesity have been largely based on health promotion, thus holding individuals alone accountable. The European Charter emphasizes instead the responsibility of government and society, so that health promotion is complemented by measures at the societal level that could make the healthy choices feasible and preferred by the majority of the population. The Charter recommends a specific focus on children and socially vulnerable groups and on internationally coordinated action, in order to prevent the increase of health gaps between countries of the European Region.

The Charter provides a clear policy orientation to curb and reverse it in the next decade, through a coordinated set of public health actions that enhance the supply and availability of healthy food while reducing that of energy dense food, and create an environment that facilitate an active lifestyle, at all life stages and in the different settings, such as schools, workplaces, communities, health infrastructures.

In particular, the Charter indicates priority actions to be implemented:

2.4.9 A package of essential preventive action should be promoted as key; countries may further prioritize interventions from this package, depending on their national circumstances and the level of policy development. *The package of essential action would include: reduction of marketing pressure, particularly to children; promotion of breastfeeding; improvement of supply of healthier food, including fruit and vegetables; economic measures that facilitate healthier food choices; offers of affordable recreational/exercise facilities,* *including support for socially disadvantaged groups; reduction of fat, free (particularly added) sugars and salt in manufactured products; promotion of cycling and walking by better urban design and transport policies; creation of opportunities in local environments that motivate people to engage in leisure time physical activity; provision of healthier foods, opportunities for daily physical activity, and nutrition and physical education in schools; facilitating and motivating people to adopt better diets and physical activity in the workplace; developing/improving national food-based dietary guidelines and guidelines for physical activity; and individually adapted health behaviour change.*

The Charter also indicates what the preferred action tools should be:

2.4.6 Policy tools range from legislation to public/private partnerships, with particular importance attached to regulatory measures. *Government should ensure consistency and sustainability through regulatory action, including legislation. Other important tools include policy reformulation, fiscal and public investment policies, health impact assessment, campaigns to raise awareness and provide consumer information, capacity-building and partnership, research, planning and monitoring. Public/private partnerships with a public health rationale and shared specified public health objectives should be encouraged. Specific regulatory measures should include: the adoption of regulations to substantially reduce the extent and impact of commercial promotion of energy-dense foods and beverages, particularly to children, with the development of international approaches, such as a code on marketing to children in this area; and the adoption of regulations for safer roads to promote cycling and walking.*

The European Charter on Counteracting Obesity is now being disseminated and is being reflected in the policy developments in the countries of the European Region. A copy of the Charter is available electronically on the WHO European Regional Office website:

http://www.euro.who.int/Document/E89567.pdf (English)
http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89568.pdf (French)
http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89567r.pdf (Russian)
http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89567g.pdf (Danish)
http://www.epicentro.iss.it/temi/croniche/pdf/carta_obesit_Istanbul.pdf (Italian)

WHO Forum and Technical Meeting on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children, Lysebu, Norway, 2 - 5 May 2006

As part of the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAS), and in preparation for the WHO European Region Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity (Istanbul, Turkey, 15 - 17 November 2006), WHO organized a Forum and Technical Meeting on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children in Lysebu, Norway, from 2 to 5 May 2006. The Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs kindly supported the meetings.

The objectives of the Forum were to:

- review the current state of knowledge regarding the influence of marketing, including advertising, of foods and non-alcoholic beverages on children's dietary choices
- discuss the implications of this influence on children's nutritional status
- review national experiences and actions taken by various stakeholders to address the issue

Participants, including academics, technical staff from ministries of health and representatives from different stakeholder groups, discussed: the evidence on the impact of marketing on children's diets; the changes that have taken place in statutory and self-regulation between 2004 and 2006[1]; different methods of categorizing foods according to their nutritional composition; and the experiences of countries with either statutory or self-regulatory processes in place.

The purpose of the Technical Meeting which followed immediately after the Forum, was to discuss and suggest possible measures that could be taken by WHO and national governments to limit the adverse impact of marketing on children's health, having considered the information presented during the Forum.

The experts agreed that marketing should be defined in accordance with the definitions of the American Marketing Association and that all forms of commercial promotion should be considered as part of the scope of any action. Promotion to children was agreed to include both promotion that is deliberately targeted to children and scheduled to reach then and promotion that is targeted at other groups but to which children are widely

[1] Based on assessments made in 2004 and 2006, see background paper: Hawkes C. *Marketing Food to Children: Changes in the Global Regulatory Environment 2004-2006*, Geneva, World Health Organization, 2006 (available at http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing/en/index.html).

exposed. The term "children" was agreed to mean all persons aged under 18, following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it was recognized that children under the age of about 13 years are more vulnerable and may therefore require more stringent protections.

The experts agreed that exposure to the commercial promotion of energy-dense, micronutrient poor foods and beverages[2] can adversely affect children's nutritional status. Meeting participants recommended that WHO: (i) supports national action to protect children from marketing by substantially reduce the volume and impact of commercial promotion of energy-dense, micro-nutrient poor foods and beverages to children; (ii) addresses issues such as cross-border TV advertising and global promotional activities; and, (iii) considers the development of an international code on the marketing of food and beverages to children. The recommendations from the Technical Meeting are detailed in part 4 of this report.

This Technical Meeting was one element of an ongoing process of evidence gathering, review and discussion with a wide range of stakeholders. This meeting and others will serve to inform WHO's future work on this issue. The report of the meeting is available electronically on the WHO website (http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/Oslo%20meeting%20layout%2027%20NOVEMBER.pdf).

UNU Harmonization of approaches for developing nutrient-based dietary standards, Florence, Italy, 14 - 17 December 2005

The United Nations University's Food and Nutrition Program, in collaboration with FAO, UNICEF and WHO, convened a group of international experts to review the harmonization of approaches for developing nutrient based dietary standards. The objectives of the meeting were to:

1) identify the concepts that must be harmonized to provide a foundation for generating nutrient-based dietary standards and define the components and terms supporting these concepts
2) harmonize guidelines for the elaboration of methods and approaches for developing nutrient- based dietary standards
3) consider specific aspects of the process for developing nutrient-based dietary standards that require adjustments for unique food patterns and lifestyles of specific populations throughout the world

The meeting reviewed these background papers and agreed on the need for harmonization and the definitions of key terms. It also developed a framework for estimating average nutrient requirements (ANRs) and Upper Nutrient Levels (UNLs). The meeting further identified criteria for establishing ANRs and UNLs and evaluated key issues related to the derivation of such values (e.g. nutrient bioavailability, extrapolation of values among diverse life-stage groups, application of standard height and weights, categorization of life stage groups, and effects of genetic variation), as well as their uses and applications especially their roles in the development of dietary guidelines.

The outcomes and recommendations of the meeting as well as the background papers stated above are published as a supplement of the Food and Nutrition Bulletin (volume 28, number 1, March 2007).

WHO/FAO/UNU Protein and Amino Acid Requirements in Human Nutrition
Report of a Joint WHO/FAO/UNU Expert Consultation, Geneva, WHO, 2002

The report of the Joint WHO/FAO/UNU Expert Consultation on Protein and Amino Acid Requirements in Human Nutrition, builds on the work of several earlier consultations and meetings. The previous landmark Joint FAO/WHO/UNU Expert Consultation was on both energy and protein requirements, and took place in Rome 1981. The report of that consultation was published as No. 724 of the WHO Technical Report Series and has been referred to extensively.

This updated report provides the conceptual framework and methods for estimating protein and amino acid requirements, as well as a comprehensive discussion of the many factors that influence protein requirements during the lifecourse including protein energy interactions. Protein quality evaluation of foods is also reviewed. The detailed derivation of the protein and amino acid requirement values relevant to each age group is provided together with discussion of the modification of these requirements under special circumstances such as catchup growth and infection. The risk to health of high intakes of protein is also examined. The implications for populations in developed and developing countries on the basis of these new recommendations are also articulated. Summary tables of all the recommendations are given plus a description of further research needs.

The conclusions of the 2002 Consultation are as well grounded as is possible, given the present state of knowledge. Nevertheless, the report is not regarded as an end-point but an important step in the continuous quest for

[2] For the purpose of this meeting "energy-dense, micronutrient poor foods and beverages" is understood as foods that are relatively high in saturated fat, free sugars and salt and relatively low in essential micronutrients and fibre.

scientifically-based answers, and for understanding the implications of these answers in terms of improved nutrition and health. Although the new recommendations are often not very different from previous recommendations, they represent a major step forward in addressing protein and amino acid requirements in human nutrition.

The document, published as WHO Technical Report Series No. 935, will be soon available electronically on the WHO website: http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/ and will be available in due course in hard copy.

FAO/WHO Guidelines on Food Fortification with Micronutrients, Geneva, WHO, 2006

Interest in micronutrient malnutrition has increased greatly over the last few years. One of the main reasons is the realization that micronutrient malnutrition contributes substantially to the global burden of disease. Furthermore, although micronutrient malnutrition is more frequent and severe in the developing world and among disadvantaged populations, it also represents a public health problem in some industrialized countries. Measures to correct micronutrient deficiencies aim at ensuring consumption of a balanced diet that is adequate in every nutrient. Unfortunately, this is far from being achieved everywhere since it requires universal access to adequate food and appropriate dietary habits. Food fortification has the dual advantage of being able to deliver nutrients to large segments of the population without requiring radical changes in food consumption patterns.

Drawing on several recent high quality publications and programme experience on the subject, information on food fortification has been critically analysed and then translated into scientifically sound Guidelines for application in the field. The production of the Guidelines has been the result of a long process that started in 2002. Under the aegis of WHO, an expert group was established and charged with the task of developing a set of guidelines on food fortification practice. A draft version of the guidelines was reviewed in 2003 by a multidisciplinary panel of experts who collectively represented the range of knowledge and experience required for developing such guidelines. The panel members included experts in public health, nutrition sciences and food technology, from both the public and the private sectors. Afterwards, the draft of the guidelines was circulated among field nutritionist and public health practitioners and also tested in a number of countries. All of the comments received through this process were considered for this finalized version of the guidelines.

The main purpose of these Guidelines is to assist countries in the design and implementation of appropriate food fortification programmes. They are intended to be a resource for governments and agencies that are currently implementing or considering food fortification, and a source of information for scientists, technologists and the food industry. The Guidelines are written from a nutrition and public health perspective, to provide practical guidance on how food fortification should be implemented, monitored and evaluated. They are primarily intended for nutrition-related public health programme managers, but should also be useful to all those working to control micronutrient malnutrition, including the food industry.

The document is organized into four complementary sections. Part I introduces the concept of food fortification as a potential strategy for the control of micronutrient malnutrition. Part II summarizes the prevalence, causes, and consequences of micronutrient deficiencies, and the public health benefits of micronutrient malnutrition control. It lays the groundwork for public health personnel to assess the magnitude of the problem and the potential benefits of fortification in their particular situation. Part III provides technical information on the various chemical forms of micronutrients that can be used to fortify foods, and reviews prior experiences of their use in specific food vehicles. Part IV describes the key steps involved in designing, implementing, and sustaining fortification programmes. Starting with a determination of the amount of nutrients to be added to foods, this process continues with the implementation of monitoring and evaluating systems (including quality control/quality assurance procedures), followed by an estimation of cost-effectiveness and cost–benefit ratios. The importance of, and strategies for, regulation and international harmonization, communication, advocacy, consumer marketing and public education are also explained in some detail.

The document is available electronically on the WHO website:

http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guide_food_fortification_micronutrients.pdf