

IOTF/International Union of Nutritional Sciences statement delivered to the Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Agriculture meeting in Rome, Feb 9 2004.

The International Union of Nutritional Sciences welcomes the discussion of the joint report of the expert meeting on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases under consideration today.

It is important to recognize that the global strategy, for which the 916 report is only one of many scientific foundations, will present great economic opportunities for farmers, particularly in developing countries.

With reference to the FAO document before you, it should be a matter of concern to everyone that paragraphs 12 and 13 suggest that the increasing consumption of fats beyond recommended limits will continue or even accelerate. The expectation that developing countries will exceed the recommended upper limits, many by a considerable margin, with an accelerating transition towards higher consumption levels, presents a daunting challenge to efforts to address the epidemics of obesity, diabetes and heart disease whilst improving the prevention of diet-induced non-communicable diseases.

The document, COAG/2004/3, recognizes that past recommendations to reduce the intake of sugar and fat have had only a limited impact on consumption (and incidentally little on production) and also notes that any consumer response to the joint Report's recommendations is unlikely to have an impact in a global sense.

It is worthwhile emphasizing the positive conclusions contained in the FAO paper which indicate that demand for the production of "more healthy" oils/fats should benefit the agricultural sector.

Paragraph 22 provides a welcome clarification that, *contrary to many of the adverse comments made by the industry regarding the potential impact of the joint report's recommendations on sugar intake*, if the entirely reasonable goal of aiming for an overall consumption of added sugars of no more than 10% of total calories were implemented throughout the world, increases in demand and production in 85 developing countries where consumption is below this level, could offset any reduction in demand in the rest of the world.

It is unclear if the analysis has taken into account population growth over the next 20 years, which will require major increases in food production worldwide.

It is worth noting that the review recognizes, as did the Oxfam policy paper on sugar less than two years ago, that reform of protectionist subsidy regimes in Europe and the USA would deliver economic benefits far greater than present aid programmes to those developing countries dependent on sugar production.

However the accelerating trend towards the consumption of processed flour and other products, with implied loss of nutrients, is a matter of concern. Paragraph 32 notes this is driven by the increasing globalisation of food industries, the spread of supermarkets and rapid urbanization now witnessed in many developing countries, while rapidly changing social and economic conditions also lead to increased use of edible oils along with salt and sugar in many commercial, convenience foods even though they adversely affect the provision of a healthy diet.

It is also noteworthy that adopting the WHO/FAO report's recommendations for increased consumption of fruit and vegetables could stimulate significant new production increases particularly benefiting developing countries and enabling where appropriate the substitution of crops such as sugar cane.

It is crucial that the points emphasized in paragraph 35 are acted upon in a coherent manner, as part of an effective global strategy. The development of an improved infrastructure to deliver fresh and suitably processed food products is a pre-requisite to the delivery of improved health, which also offers considerable opportunities for economic advancement of those countries well placed to meet a rising demand for healthier food.

The collaboration already underway between FAO and WHO to develop new initiatives to promote the production and consumption of fruits and vegetables is most welcome and should be given the full support of member states.

Donald Mitchell of the World Bank described in the lunchtime briefing how developing countries would be huge winners in terms of increased fruit and vegetable growing, which, in his terms, "would completely swamp" any losses from sugar production.

There are enormous prizes awaiting all countries by supporting the global strategy on diet, both for health and wealth and particularly for the developing world.

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