

Dear Dr Nishida

Thank you for the opportunity to be informed and contribute to the FAO/WHO consultation process on diet, nutrition, and the prevention of chronic diseases.

please find attached brief comments.

AFIC is unable to attend the meeting in process. Nevertheless, thank you for the invitation, and we look forward to the report of outcomes in due course

Kind Regards

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Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic disease

Written response from Asian Food Information Centre

AFIC is a not-for profit Singapore-registered organisation, with offices in Bangkok. AFIC is funded by the food industry but does not represent or advocate any company or product, nor does it represent commercial or trade interests of the food industry. Its mission is to effectively communicate science-based information on food safety, health and nutrition to media and other key audiences in Asia.

AFIC welcomes the opportunity to engage in this consultation process, although the somewhat short notice period has precluded the option to provide representation in person. AFIC also looks forward to the guidance and opportunities for partnership, that this process will bring to its own nutrition communication programmes.

AFIC is a communications organisation, and the following comments reflect AFIC's focus on nutrition communications.

1. AFIC endorses the three broad nutrition education action points recommended (p.47)
 - To utilise mass communication channels
 - Provide guidelines for the use of/content of educational materials on diet and health to ensure they are sound and non-biased
 - Ensure that messages are tailored and tested so as to be heard, relevant and understood by all groups in society.

Specific reference to bias from the food industry seems rather narrow and does not explicitly recognise that bias may be exerted from many other interest groups and lobbies.

2. AFIC supports recommendations to extend nutritional labelling, and signposting. Initiatives that support informed consumer choice are likely to extend nutrition education both at individual and population level.
3. The inclusion of physical activity within the framework for prevention seems highly appropriate because
 - Clearly the energy balance equation must take account of expenditure as well as intake

- The summary of evidence demonstrates that this factor impacts on risk of developing five of the six non-communicable diet-related chronic diseases considered in the consultation process, and therefore has the very significant potential to reduce prevalence of NCD morbidity and mortality..

4. AFIC also supports the sentiments expressed in Page 19 para 3 “The combination of physical activity, food variety, and extensive social interaction is the most likely lifestyle profile to optimise health, reflected in increased longevity and healthy ageing” . This statement emphasises the benefits of choice and freedom in diet and lifestyle. With regards to increasing globalisation of food and diets it is important to note that globalisation is associated with potentially positive, as well as negative nutritional trends. Increasing globalisation of diets is associated with increased choice and variety, recognised as a significant factor in quality of diet, as well as negative trends such as increased consumption of total and saturated fat consumption.

Increased dietary choice also supports other essential elements of eating behaviour such as the potential for increased pleasure and enjoyment of food, and support for the changing patterns in society, such as the changing roles of women.

Clearly there are also very significant economic and social implications with regards to increasing globalisation of diets, but in terms of nutrition perhaps the best way forwards is to focus not just on national food supply and trade policies, but also on how to support informed consumer choice, so that ordinary consumers may gain maximum benefit, and minimise risk as a result of the increased choice in diet and lifestyle that the changes in the food supply chain bring.

Georgina Cairns, executive director, 5/4/02