

Diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases

Draft report of the joint WHO/FAO expert consultation

Comments on behalf of the New Zealand beef and lamb industry:

Global Health

Section 2 The current state of the food supply at a global level

The statement on page 9 that ‘the agricultural sector must be given due consideration in the discussion of promoting healthy eating guidelines at the global level,...’ is welcomed, and supported as an essential factor in the implementation of this report. It is wrong though to simplify the situation to one of plant-based production systems versus animal-based production systems. The issue is more one of intensive versus extensive production. As the report highlights the production of some plant oils, recommended for their health benefits, may have detrimental effects on the environment – ‘even the consumption of “healthy” recommended oils, such as olive oil, may have detrimental environmental effects...when the mode of production is intensive’. Not all animal-based systems are intensive; the grass-fed systems used in New Zealand for the production of beef and lamb are a good example of an extensive, sustainable production system, of which New Zealand farmers are both proud and keen advocates. The comment on p.53 that there is an ‘apparent disregard for sustainability’ is not true of all sectors of agriculture, and an inaccurate generalisation. There is a ‘need to examine the long-term sustainability of current modes of production’ (p.11), but for all sectors of agriculture – plant-based and fish production included. As the report states, there are dilemmas facing all sectors if these proposed recommendations are to be achieved. As the comments on nutrition below illustrate, a broad-minded approach to dietary sources of nutrients needs to be taken. Red meat, for example, makes a substantial contribution to the intake of *n*-3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fat in addition to the traditionally recommended sources of oily fish and olive oil. These should be considered when required levels of production are calculated.

Nutrient Recommendations

4.3 Nutrient recommendations for the prevention of cardiovascular diseases

Disease specific recommendations:

1 (f) To suggest that the dietary goals for fat can be achieved by limiting the intake of meat is over-simplifying the situation, and misleading. It is a common assumption that meat is high in fat and that the majority of fat in red meat is saturated. In fact, both lean beef and lamb contains less than 10% fat, with only about half of this fat being saturated. A reasonable proportion of the saturated fat is stearic – a fatty acid which is now known to have a neutral effect on cholesterol. Although meat does contain palmitic acid, myristic acid, of which meat contains hardly any, has a much greater negative effect on cholesterol than palmitic acid. Red meat contains a substantial amount of monounsaturated acid, similar to olive oil. It also contains useful amounts of *n*-3 fatty acids, being a major contributor to dietary intake, alongside fish, in many developed countries, where fish intake has decreased. As a

consequence, the $n-6:n-3$ ratio is favourable. This is particularly true in areas such as New Zealand, where animals are grass-fed, and have higher levels of α -linolenic acid.

4.4 Nutrient recommendations for the prevention of cancer

Disease specific recommendations:

7 The recommendation about meat is, again, too generalised. The previous two pages of the report state that it is only preserved meats that have a probable link to colorectal cancer. The current evidence does not show any link with fresh meat, and therefore the recommendation should not make any suggestions regarding red meat per se. It is also unnecessary to start the recommendation with ‘those who are not vegetarian’.

Overall

It is disappointing not to see consideration of iron deficiency/iron deficiency anaemia in this report. Whilst acknowledging that this is a report largely concerned with macronutrients, the inclusion of osteoporosis makes the omission all the more surprising. With the continued drive within strategy towards a plant-based diet, the important role and balance of micronutrients is constantly undermined. We will ignore this fact as our cost, as the push away from nutrient-dense foods such as red meat, will inevitably result in reduced intakes of essential micronutrients, such as iron.