WN *Update*

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Development. Pan American Health Organization
Action in Washington

Access December 2012 Monteiro et al on The Food System here
Access February 2014 Monteiro et al on ultra-processed product reformulation here
Access July 2014 PAHO plan of action to prevent obesity here
Access September 2014 PAHO fact sheet on ultra-processed products, obesity here
Access September 2014 CSO statement in support of PAHO obesity plan here





In Latin America, freshly prepared meals are being displaced by ultra-processed products made by transnational corporations. The Pan American Health Organization is proposing effective action

The Development team reports:

This report is made with thanks to Enrique Jacoby of the Pan American Health Organisation, and Jean-Claude Moubarac, compiler of the fact sheet summarised on the next page.

All significant improvements in public health involve the use of law. There are no exceptions. This rule has in effect been accepted by the secretariat of the Pan American Health Organization, for *the meeting of its Directing Council* being held in the week of 29 September – 3 October. The plan of action to prevent obesity in the Americas includes the use of statutory regulations, including fiscal policies. It also includes quantified targets for prevention and control of obesity, with special attention to children.

A fact sheet prepared for the Council meeting identifies *ultra-processed food and drink products* as the key cause of obesity in the Americas (see Box 1, below). This follows firm guidance from PAHO director Carissa Etienne. Over 150 international and

national civil society organisations have sent *a statement of support* to PAHO, urging member states to approve the ground-breaking plan of action. At the time of writing it seems likely to be accepted as the basis for strong policies and actions in Latin America, with the US and Canada abstaining.

Box 1

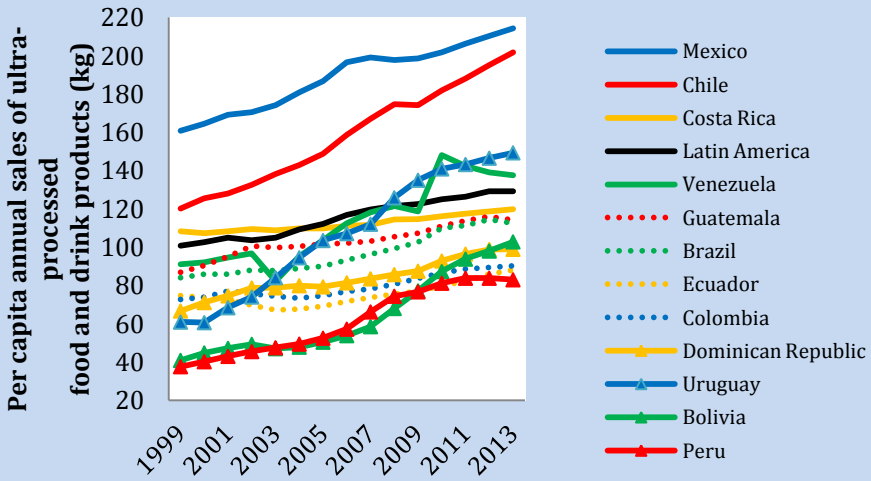
Ultra-processed products and obesity in Latin America

Edited extract from the fact sheet prepared for the directing council of PAHO being held on 29 September - 3 October 2014

- Ultra-processed food and drink products are ready-to-eat or drink formulations based on refined substances with combinations of sugar, fat and salt, plus several additives. They include sugary drinks, snacks, and 'fast foods'.
- The World Health Organization and the World Cancer Research Fund conclude that sugary drinks, energy-dense snacks and 'fast food' are key drivers of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some cancers.
- A Pan American Health Organization study (below, Figure1) shows that from 1999 to 2013, per capita sales of ultra-processed products continuously increased in 12 Latin American countries, displacing traditional diets based on wholesome foods and meals.
- A further study shows that the increase in sales of ultra-processed products was associated with an increase in adult body mass index (BMI) at all levels of consumption, after adjusting for covariates (R^2=0.79; p<0.0001).

Current trends in production and consumption of ultra-processed products, and corresponding increases in BMI, can be reversed by statutory regulation. Correspondingly, production and accessibility of wholesome foods need to be increased and improved by regulatory actions designed to make healthy choices the easy choices.

Figure 1. Trends in annual per capita sales of selected ultra-processed food and drink products (kg) in 12 Latin American countries from 1999-2013



Ultra-processed food and drink products here include carbonated drinks, fruit and vegetable juices, 'sports' and 'energy' drinks, breakfast cereals, sweet and savoury snacks, confectionery, ice creams, biscuits, spreads, sauces and ready meals. Quantity in litres was converted into kilograms.

*The Development team. Pan American Health Organization. Action in Washington [Update]. World Nutrition October 2014, **5**, 10, 819-820*



Development. International Conference on Nutrition

Traction in Rome

Access May 2014 WPHNA response to ICN2 draft FFA here
Access July-August 2014 Fabio Gomes et al on ICN2 here
Access September 2014 Fabio Gomes et al on ICN2 here
Access September 2014 civil society statement to ICN2 here

The Development team reports:

This report is made with thanks to Stefano Prato of the Society for International Development, Flavio Valente of FIAN International, and Claudio Schuftan of the People's Health Movement, who with many other colleagues are playing leading parts in the processes summarised below.

At last, very late in the process, UN officials responsible for the International Conference on Nutrition taking place in Rome next month on 19-21 November, are responding to urgent demands made by public interest organisations and social movements. Collectively these are more directly representative of the populations and communities most affected by the global monolithic industrial food system than are national governments. International organisations and movements are also able to track the activities of transnational corporations.

The news as this issue of *Update* was completed, is that space will be created at the ICN for independent civil society organisations, and funds will be found for adequate physical representation. The confirmation of this from ICN officials states:

> A CSO Declaration is to be presented during ICN2, as part of the Conference outputs, and posted on the ICN2 website as the result of the CSO participation in the ICN2 process. When developing the list of CSOs to participate in the CSO pre-conference Forum and in the ICN2 itself, and selecting those organizations whose participation shall be funded, the CSO ICN2 liaison group, in consultation with FAO and WHO, should take into consideration the need to ensure a balanced representation in terms of geography, gender, and constituencies represented.

Discontent to denunciation

Public interest civil society organisations are discontent with work done so far for the ICN. The mood ranges from discontent to denunciation. Having examined the latest versions of the ICN 'outcome documents', its Declaration and also its Framework for Action, at the time of writing still being negotiated, a group representing around 150 organisations has *sent a strong statement* to the ICN2 secretariat. A media release complains about lack of response to civil society requests, made constantly during this

year. It says that the Declaration and Framework for Action as so far drafted are pallid, take inadequate account of the circumstances of the last decade, have a narrow view of nutrition, generally avoid quantified targets, and are technical in areas that are political.

The public interest groups are working directly with representatives of sympathetic UN member states. Their hope is to achieve final ICN2 outcome documents that are adequately substantive. Edited and abbreviated extracts from a long *civil society statement* to the ICN2 'open-ended working group' sent on 22 September include the following statements, requests and demands. These so far are a core of the public interest organisation and social movement statement to be made at the ICN. They are addressed to ICN officials and also to UN member states.

- Governance and accountability mechanisms for the implementation of ICN2 appear unclear, fragmented and duplicative. Member States need to develop a legitimate, coherent, accountable and participatory governance mechanism.
- Member States need to establish an accountability framework based on principles of human rights, that enables the direct engagement of the populations and communities most affected by different forms of malnutrition.
- This framework should also address private sector partnerships and ensure that transnational corporations and other economic actors act in accordance with the public good and follow human rights-based frameworks and norms.
- Member States need to ensure that trade and investment agreements do not take primacy over the implementation of the right to adequate food and nutrition. Food and agriculture policies and investments must lead to improved nutrition
- Governments need to protect themselves against powerful economic actors, including transnational corporations. They should review and potentially terminate 'public-private partnerships' involving such actors.
- Member States need to regulate land and water grabbing; contamination with agrochemicals; commodification of seeds; marketing of breast milk substitutes; and production and marketing of ultra-processed food and drink products.
- Member States need to ensure that the ICN2 outcome documents address the social, economic and political determinants of malnutrition in all its forms rather than merely propose treatment that only addresses symptoms.
- The outcome documents must promote reshaping of food systems to improve nutrition for greater health, with an understanding of food as being the expression of values, cultures, social relations and people´s self-determination.
- The outcome documents must valorise systems based on food sovereignty, agro-biodiversity, ecological foundations and sustainable use of natural resources, native seeds and traditional knowledge, and local markets and value chains.
- The centrality of small-scale food producers must be re-affirmed and enhanced. Their access to and control over assets such as land, water, seeds, technical and financial resources is essential for diversified dietary patterns.

- Any approach that promotes food fortification as the main path to address nutritional unbalances is wrong, as are technological fixes that do not recognise the determinants of preventable malnutrition.
- Member States are urged to address the underlying causes of malnutrition so that existing product-based approaches such as vitamin A capsules and ready-to-use foods can be phased out
- Development of new plant varieties needs to build on traditional methods and approaches that protect native seeds, rather than engaging in genetic modification that may present grave consequences for biodiversity and food sovereignty.
- Realisation of the right to food and nutrition is hampered by economic, social and political inequalities. Member states should ensure proper regulation, transparency and accountability of powerful economic actors, like transnational corporations.

Box 1

Time for agroecology

This is an abbreviation of the Inter Press Service report by Geneviève Lavoie-Mathieu published on 25 September

'It is time for a new agriculture model that ensures that enough quality food is produced where it is most needed, that preserves nature, and that delivers ecosystem services of local and global relevance' – *agroecology*. Pablo Tittonell of Wageningen University was speaking at the *international symposium on agroecology* for food security and nutrition held on 17 September, organised and hosted by FAO in Rome. *In an open letter* to the director-general of FAO and to potential funders, 70 scientists and scholars state that in times of climate change, food insecurity and poverty, 'agroecology, when paired with principles of food sovereignty and food justice, addresses all of these problems'. Signatories include Hans Herren of the Millennium Institute, and Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved*.

Agroecology is a social movement. It includes diversifying of species and genetic resources and the recycling of nutrients and organic matter. It has a set of socio-economic and political principles that questions the basis of the current dominant agriculture system. It deals with who gets access to resources and the processes that determine this access.

'The principles of autonomy, the importance of the combination of traditional knowledge and economic knowledge, the co-construction of solutions by peasants' organisations, researchers and citizens, are key in defining agroecology' says agronomist Gaëtan Vanloqueren. At the centre of agroecology are knowledgeable farmers. Agroeology is about substituting inputs with knowledge, and fostering autonomy through both knowledge and independence from global markets. It is about social equity and about democracy.

Quentin Delachapelle, vice-president of the French national federation for initiatives to support sustainable agriculture told the FAO symposium that one of the main obstacles to agroecology is that it is based on a long term vision. 'Unfortunately, current public and market policies are based solely on a short-term perspective'.

*The Development team. International Conference on Nutrition. Traction in Rome [Development]. World Nutrition October 2014, **5, 10**, 821-823*

Development. The Oxford conference

Protecting and creating good food systems

Access September 2014 Oxford conference programme here
Access September 2014 Update on Oxford conference here
Access September 2014 Thiago de Sá et al on Oxford conference here



The venue, the organisers, and some of the speakers. Keble College, Oxford; Barrie Margetts and Simon Capewell; Anna Lartey, Carlos Monteiro, Mike Rayner, Francesco Branca, Sharon Friel

The Development team reports:

Keble College, Oxford, whose unique design is shown above, was built in furtherance of a high ideal, to exalt the Anglican Church. It remains a monument to that faith. Many professionals working in public health and nutrition have a secular vision, of a more equitable world. Of these, many gathered at Keble College in September. The topic of the two-day conference was food systems, a concept and a reality agreed to be crucial to world health, requiring big thinking and broad analysis. Many presentations are on the World Public Health Nutrition Association website

Day one

Speakers at the conference agreed – explicitly or implicitly – that the countless number of food systems that have evolved and been adapted over the millennia, in response to local conditions, circumstances and culture, now have been or are being displaced by one monolithic industrial food system. After the first session introduced by Barrie Margetts, summarised by Simon Capewell (above, left), this was a theme of presentations in the next session chaired by UN Food and Agriculture Organization head of nutrition Anna Lartey, by *Carlos Monteiro* and Mike Rayner (next to them, above). Carlos Monteiro presented a summary of the new national Brazilian food guide, which valorises long-established and traditional food systems.



His slide above shows some of the implication of dietary guidelines based on food and freshly prepared meals, for national and global agriculture and food policies. The afternoon session of the first day, chaired by World Health Organization head of nutrition Francesco Branca and Sharon Friel, (above, right) both of whom were also outstanding speakers. These included presentations by Tim Lang and by Gerard Hastings (on the left in the pictures on the next page), and by Guy Poppy.

Tim Lang made a penetrating analysis, showing the division between those who believe the industrial food system is basically sound while needing to be tweaked, and those like him – and probably most participants at the conference – who see that it is broken, and needing to be replaced. Like Carlos Monteiro he stressed the need for sustainable dietary guidelines, whose implications include those shown above. Guy Poppy gave a profound and learned presentation drawing on experience in Colombia and Malawi, asking how to achieve food security and environmental stability in the context of climate change and population increase. Inspirational leadership is needed.

Gerard Hastings made a fiery presentation, in the same mood as the interventions by Simon Capewell and several conference participants and speakers, notably including David Sanders and Aseem Malhotra. He spoke 'in praise of disobedience', quoting the 17th century advocate of direct action and civil disobedience Étienne de la Boétie. He urged the need for militant public interest organisations and social movements, able to replace current oppressive corporate-driven consumer culture, with genuine democracy that will protect the interests of populations and the planet.

In the evening of the first day, Flavio Valente and Fabio Gomes co-chaired in intensely debated informal session on engagement of public interest organisations and social movements with the FAO-WHO International Conference on Nutrition taking place in November. (See the Update preceding this one. The session was briefed by Francesco Branca, one of the architects of this UN conference, who stressed the need for civil society organisations to speak with one voice

Day two



Tim Lobstein, Boyd Swinburn and David Stuckler (middle pictures below) presented on the second day of the conference. Tim Lobstein showed how manufacturers of ultra-processed products, who drive the monolithic industrial food system, incessantly target children (pictures above). Boyd Swinburn, convenor of the Informas project, showed how organised civil society, with support from networked research centres, can hold corporations to account. David Stuckler explicitly identified transnational ultra-processed food and drink product manufacturers as drivers of what is now the pandemic of diabetes as well as of obesity.

The conference completed with presentations from France, Mexico, Brazil, Peru and South Africa. *The outstanding speaker* was Alejandro Calvillo, (second from the right, below) director of *El Poder del Consumidor* (Consumer Power) in Mexico. He highlighted the catastrophic impact of sugared soft drinks on rates of diabetes, and the dramatic methods his organisation uses to arouse citizens and alarm politicians. The conference and future directions were then summed up by Philip James (right, below). During the conference, David Stuckler, Gerard Hastings, Alejandro Calvillo, David Sanders and Flavio Valente became members of the WN editorial family.



More of the speakers at the Keble College food systems conference. Tim Lang, Gerard Hastings, Tim Lobstein, Boyd Swinburn, David Stuckler, Alejandro Calvillo and summariser Philip James

The Update team. Development. The Oxford conference. Protecting and creating good food systems. [Update]. World Nutrition October 2014, ***5****, 10, 713-714*



WN *Balance*

Living well in hope

[Access July 2012 Best Food on Earth: Peru. Enrique Jacoby here]
[Access August 2012 Best Food on Earth: Peru. Enrique Jacoby, Patricia Murillo here]
[Access June 2014 Good food systems of the Americas. Enrique Jacoby et al here]
[Access September 2014 Good food systems. Thiago de Sa, Diana Parra et al here]





Matthew Rooney from north Essex shows off his pale and chocolate oyster mushrooms (picture left). Then at right, loaves made using traditional recipes by charitable artisan bakery, Better Health

Editor's note

Cities all over the world have covered, open and street markets and vendors offering fresh food and dishes made from fresh food. These may also be centres of conviviality where people of like minds and hearts gather and discuss family and community concerns and great local and global issues of the day. Hetty Einzig begins a occasional series on striving to live wisely and well, celebrating the farmer's market in Stoke Newington, Hackney, London.

Hetty Einzig reports:

Stoke Newington, London. My daughters Louisa and Madeleine, now university graduates, grew up in Hackney, still measured as one of London's most impoverished boroughs. Predominantly working class, the area where I live is a glorious mix of communities from Turkey, Pakistan, India and the Caribbean plus families like mine who came to live in Stoke Newington ('Stokey' to its residents) because housing was cheap (long ago!) and love being here. Parks are plentiful, there are no chain-stores and only one supermarket (we residents are fighting the threat of another).



Me (left) buying damsons for a supper with a visiting friend and family. We ate them lightly stewed with raw cream from another stall. At the market people eat, drink, meet, and make friends.

The shopkeepers and customers here get to know and look out for one another. My local farmers' and growers' market was started in 2003 by Kerry Rankine. Three years ago it moved to its present site in the forecourt of St Paul's Church, linking Dalston to the south with the families, cafés and eateries of Stoke Newington to the north. The vicar, Niall Weir, passionately community-minded, runs a help-yourself kitchen garden, 'open-door', and Action for the Homeless schemes.

My work involves a lot of foreign travel, and when I come home I need to ground myself. After cleaning the kitchen, I head to the market on Saturday morning to stock up for the week. This feels good on several counts. I touch, smell and purchase good-looking, wholesome foods from people who grow them. The mood is festive, we chat and exchange news, I bump into friends, sit for a while. I am supporting those determined to live on the land. It is satisfying to play my part in this benign cycle, instead of taking the dead easy option of going to the supermarket. Instead many of us now think small. The market's rules are simple but profound. All food sold here must be environmentally sustainable (defined as produced through organic or biodynamic farming); part of a small-scale operation; locally sourced; seasonal; and fairly traded. Also all the food must come from within a 70-mile radius.



Sea bass caught by the fishing boat 'Our Betty' on England's south coast (left) and varieties of squash and pumpkins (right) grown from seeds not used for commercial supermarket produce



Sloes (left) and varieties of small tomatoes with beetroot and squash in the background (right). These cost less in supermarkets, but I prefer to support growers' families than corporate profits

As a citizen, disturbed about how my country and the world are governed now, I feel at home in the market, and sense hope for the future. The sellers and buyers here are working out ways to live wisely and well, based on a vision of human-scale, inter-connected and locally run. We are members of a community, which includes responding to street dwellers who occasionally seek coins or food.

For my family and a growing number of others, food is about more than nutrition in the usual sense. It's about nourishment, a much broader idea which links to the natural philosophy of the good life well led. In this food, and its place in nature, the home, our bodies and our relationships, is an essential part.

I have got to know some of the growers. Many, especially 'old timers' who have been part of a ten year community partnership, enjoy a slower pace with conversation. On my most recent visit my chats included best ways to cook squid, catching up with Marina of the Apricot Centre on her permaculture courses, the latest news on a feud over land-holding that last year split up a founder stall-holding family, and inevitably, this being the last Saturday before the referendum, The Vote on Scotland. The market was buzzing with 'Yes for Independence' talk. I overheard an intense celebration of the latest clarion call by the deep green *George Monbiot.* Our farmers' market is a natural gathering place for those who sense that any public issue attacked by all main party politicians, must therefore have something good going for it!



Mushrooms, other fungi, and onions. Above all it is so good for children to see – and to touch, taste and understand – where real fresh food comes from, in its astounding colours, shapes and sizes



The art and craft of making real bread from various varieties and types of grain is flourishing now (left), and (right) the market includes take-away foods and snacks made wholly from organic food

Early Quakers and other non-conformists, including Daniel Defoe and Mary Wollstonecraft, settled here. Dissent remains strong. The market is a forum for the kind of informed, lively discussions that sustain communities. After the market, we take a long walk to the Lea River navigation canal towards the Olympic Park.

Hackney Wick, once a scruffy light industrial zone, is now teeming with liveliness, Cafés and clubs have moved in. Festivals sprout all summer. Much of this energy comes from young Londoners supported by the council and by Olympic legacy funds. The woods, playing fields and marshes that line the canal remain. Bourgeois tendencies are minimal and benign. There is little litter. The canal is dredged and clean. Nose-to-tail houseboats are being spruced up for the winter. The tow path is now a well-used cycle path. Graveyards and filter beds have been restored as pleasant places to linger and for children to play. Strangers tend to smile in greeting. The neighbourhood is not paradise, concrete walls are scrawled, but some of the graffiti is beautiful (below). The feel is of people making the canal their home and valuing where they are in this once neglected part of our astonishing ancient great city. Within all this, our farmers' market is a reason why people can live well here. At home we enjoy our meals all the more because of knowing and sensing such things.



The spirit of place in cities is sensed by the nature and quality of graffiti. Here are two examples: an emblem on a houseboat moored on the Lea Navigation Canal, and a sun on a garden wall

Einzig H. Balance. Living well in hope
*[Update]. World Nutrition October 2014, **5**, 10, 827-830*



Big Food Watch

The transnationals show their hand

Access February 2014 Carlos Monteiro et al on product reformulation here
Access September 2014 IFBA reformulation pledge here
Access September 2014 CGI reduction of sugared soda in US pledge here



It's not just Pepsi! The Big Soda companies have banded together to give US politicians and UN officials the idea that they are part of the solution and not – which they are –creating the problem

The *Big Food Watch* team reports

The transnational ultra-processed product manufacturers run as a pack. By its existence, their International Food and Beverage Association proves this point. On 22 September IFBA *issued a media release* and has *written to Margaret Chan*, director-general of the World Health Organization, pledging to reformulate some of their products. The result, *as stated in WN*, will be products with somewhat less fat, sugar or salt, which remain inherently unhealthy, but which will be licensed to make health claims. These will increase transnational corporate penetration of the global South, thus displacing long-established rational, nourishing and sustainable food systems based on meals. Reformulation is actually highly profitable new product development.

'I am excited about the potential of this voluntary commitment by the beverage industry. It can be a critical step in our ongoing fight against obesity' Bill Clinton said, of an even more audacious move by Big Drink at the launch on 21-24 September in New York City of his Clinton Global Initiative. This is a pledge to reduce manufacture in the US of fully sugared cola and other soft drinks by 20 per cent, by

the year 2025. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation is delighted. AHG partners the American Heart Association say: 'Their pledge to reduce the visibility and consumption of full calorie sodas… is a positive step forward towards improving the public health'.

Sounds good? What the American Heart Association and practically all the world's media have so far failed to notice, is that at present trends, sales of full sugared soft drinks will be down by around 20 per cent in ten years' time, anyway. The US market is super-saturated. The money is in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where Big Drink is achieving annual double-digit (10+ per cent) sales growth.

Yoni Freedhoff reports

All Big Soda is actually doing is pledging to take credit for the decade from now outcome of the rapidly shifting and growing consumer sentiment, that has already led to a marked reduction in sugar-sweetened beverage sales – a reduction that's likely to accelerate as the World Health Organization's recommendation that added sugar be capped at 6 teaspoons daily is formally accepted, as nutrition fact panel reform that specifically calls out added sugar goes live, and as the science fingering excess free sugar consumption as a bad plan continues to accumulate. In fact given the growing groundswell against free sugar, I'd be genuinely surprised if sugar sweetened beverage sales don't go down by more than 20% over the coming decade.

This is all just smoke and mirrors. Hitching themselves to the already rapidly decreasing consumer interest in their products is a brilliant move that will likely help Big Soda to forestall soda taxes and legislation by allowing them to pretend that they're part of the solution.

What sorts of consumer campaigns would convince me that Big Soda really did want to drive down their own profits (which they legally can't because of their fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders) and change American's beverage choices?

Campaigns telling consumers that they should immediately and dramatically minimise their consumption of soda, that switching to artificially sweetened beverages is only a shift to a lesser evil and that their consumption too should be minimised, and that tap water is hugely preferable to bottled water as bottled water is an entirely unnecessary and expensive environmental blight. We might also see food industry pledges not just to make smaller sizes, but to stop selling larger ones, slashes to advertising budgets, and a commitment to immediately stop using Santa Claus, polar bears, teen idols, and sport and entertainment industry celebrities and stars to hawk their products.

Anything less than the above is just lip service.

Big Food Watch team, and Yoni Freedhoff. The transnationals show their hand [Big Food Watch] Update. World Nutrition October 2014, 5, 10, 831-832



Hot stuff

Fat innocent, carbohydrate guilty? The conundrum and the solution

Access December 2012 position paper Monteiro et al on The Food System here
Access August 2014 The Lancet Dariush Mozaffarian on dietary guidelines here
Access September 2014 Hot stuff on saturated fat, sugar, and heart disease here
Access 1 September 2014 New York Times on fat, carbohydrate and weight here
Access 3 September 2014 JAMA Dariush Mozaffarian et al on processing here



The experts collide on nutrients and obesity. Anahad O'Connor reports. Lydia Bazzano investigates. Dariush Mozaffarian, Ronald Krauss, David Katz, Kenneth Rogoff, react or else propose solutions

Editor's note

WN occasionally publishes contributions on theses or topics currently the subject of intense debate. This *Update* is an example. It is a matter of judgement as to when debate is heated enough to be identified as *Hot Stuff. WN* welcomes responses for our *Feedback* section

The Update team reports:

In the US at least, there seems to be agreement on the role of specific nutrients in the causation of obesity as well as heart disease. The agreement is that there is no agreement. The experts disagree, often furiously. The consensus position made and held for half a century, which is that dietary fat as such is a main cause of obesity, and that saturated fat as such is a main cause of heart disease, is now constantly attacked.

Which nutrients are the bad guys?

Here (left, above) is iconoclastic *New York Times* reporter Anahad O'Connor (1,2), himself an author of a dieting book, on a new study hitting the headlines in media feature and health pages in the US (3,4):

> People who avoid carbohydrates and eat more fat, even saturated fat, lose more body fat and have fewer cardiovascular risks than people who follow the low-fat diet that health authorities have favored for decades, a major new study shows. The findings are unlikely

> to be the final salvo in what has been a long and often contentious debate about what foods are best to eat for weight loss and overall health. The notion that dietary fat is harmful, particularly saturated fat, arose decades ago from comparisons of disease rates among large national populations. But more recent clinical studies in which individuals and their diets were assessed over time have produced a more complex picture. Some have provided strong evidence that people can sharply reduce their heart disease risk by eating fewer carbohydrates and more dietary fat, with the exception of *trans* fats. The new findings suggest that this strategy more effectively reduces body fat.

The 'major study' in which 150 people were assigned to diets identified as low-carbohydrate or low-fat for a year, was funded by the US National Institutes of Health. Its lead author was Lydia Bazzano of Tulane University, New Orleans (second from left, above). In support of its findings, Daruish Mozaffarian (third from left), now Dean of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, is quoted as saying:

> To my knowledge, this is one of the first long-term trials that's given these diets without calorie restrictions… It shows that in a free-living setting, cutting your carbs helps you lose weight without focusing on calories. And that's really important, because someone can change what they eat more easily than trying to cut down on their calories.

Ronald Krauss of Oakland Research Institute (third from right), former chair of the American Heart Association's dietary guidelines committee, was also inrerviewed. He says that refined carbohydrates contribute to atherosclerosis, while saturated fat is less likely to do so, at least when carbohydrate intake is not high. And:

> I've been a strong advocate of moving saturated fat down the list of priorities in dietary recommendations for one reason: because of the increasing importance of metabolic syndrome and the role that carbohydrates play.

'Stone Age' science

Time was when debate between scientists was conducted in stately fashion, in conferences and journals. No more, in our age of electronic response. David Katz, Director of Yale University's Prevention Research Centre, (second from right), who likes a fight, thinks the new study as worse than worthless. He writes (5):

> The concept of low-carb is terribly outdated, and was silly when it was first spawned. Everything from lentils to lollipops is carbohydrate; why on earth would anyone want to treat such a vast expanse of the food supply as if it were just one thing? Sillier still, all plant food is a carbohydrate source. A truly 'low-carb' diet is, of necessity, low in all plant foods – including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, and lentils along with whole grains. This is at odds with everything we know about diet and health across the lifespan.

He then launches an exocet against the study's design:

> The 'low-fat' diet was, for starters, not much lower in fat than the typical American diet, which as we all know is basically crap. Shockingly, the fiber intake was virtually identical,

> at about 15-16 grams per day, in both groups throughout the study. You cannot possibly eat any variant on the theme of 'good' low-fat, mostly plant-based eating and fix the fiber intake at that pitiful level. The only way to do that is to combine modestly low fat with preferentially crummy foods made mostly from refined starches and added sugars…It's clear that the low fat diet was (A) not low fat; and (B) rather crummy. A title option was: 'a comparison of the best low-carb diet to the worst low-fat diet we could come up with'.

Researchers who may be virulently hostile to other researchers' work over drinks, are usually only elliptical in print. Not so David Katz. He concludes of the study:

> It is both prehistoric, and propaganda. It was a comparison of a quite restricted, lower-calorie, low-fiber diet; to a less restricted, higher calorie, equally low-fiber diet. The first worked better for weight loss. Ignored in the mix? Was the diet sustainable when the intervention ended? Could families join in? Would the diet reliably improve health and prevent disease across a lifespan? Not relevant, because this was a study designed to generate a predictably useless, misleading, and potentially harmful answer to an egregiously silly and perhaps even willfully disingenuous question.

In general, his blitz aside, David Katz has little faith in dietary guidelines based on nutrients. 'I am an advocate, based on the evidence, of wholesome foods in sensible combinations'. He also believes in the old adage of 'a little of what you fancy does you good', saying cryptically: 'All of us can hope to love the food that loves us back'.

It's all in the processing

Dariush Mozaffarian, with distinguished colleagues, has an answer to the fat-carbohydrate war. He also does not believe in nutrient-based guidelines, saying as quoted, 'Health authorities should pivot away from fat restrictions, and encourage people to eat fewer processed foods, particularly those with refined carbohydrates'. He has also stated (6), in a *Lancet* editorial:

> Now is the time to redesign… dietary guidelines. We need to move away from unhelpful classifications and policies based on crude groupings of merely chemically related nutrients (eg, total saturated fat) and their predicted or postulated effects on risk – which, in addition to scientific dubiousness, create confusion for consumers and opportunities for manipulation by industry - and towards food-based guidelines.

He goes further, and in so doing, resolves the nutrient wars. He explains, in common with *The Food System* thesis as published in *WN* (7), that the issue is not nutrients, and is not food, so much as what is done to food before it is acquired and consumed – which is to say, the big issue is food processing, a view shared by the INFORMAS group led by Boyd Swinburn (8). In the *Journal of the American Medical Association* Daruish Mozaffarian, David Ludwig (8), and former International Monetary Fund chief economist Kenneth Rogoff (at right, above) (9), propose a flat tax of 10-30 per cent not merely on 'junk foods' and soft drinks, but on most of the packaged

processed food products that have to be labelled, by analogy with taxes imposed on alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. 'More highly processed foods have been linked with chronic disease through numerous mechanisms' they say, citing a commentary that specifically identifies ultra-processed food products (10). Moreover:

> Mortality from motor vehicle crashes was not reduced by driver education alone, or by labeling cars with information on crash risk, but instead by comprehensive multi-component policies addressing the driver, the car, and the road.

And also, that address the automobile industry. The authors also propose, consistent with moves already being made in Latin America, that the revenue from these taxes be used to subsidise all 'minimally processed healthful foods'. Hot stuff indeed, with massive public policy implications. Watch this *Update* space.

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WN
Our extending family



Broadening our scope. Six additional members of the WN family. From the left are Colin Tudge, David Stuckler, Gerard Hastings, and then Alejandro Calvillo, David Sanders, Flavio Valente

The six new members of the *WN* family pictured above, have joined as authors, contributors, reviewers, networkers or guides, on the occasion of the September conference on healthy food systems, held at Keble College, Oxford, reviewed earlier in Update. They all work, think, write, speak, and act in fields that need to be seen as fundamental and central to public health and nutrition.

The first three, on the left, are scholars and much more besides. They awaken us to past events, present realities, and future prospects. *Colin Tudge,* a regular *WN* contributor, is on the left. Ever since his first books, *The Famine Business* and *Future Cook,* he has spoken for what he now calls 'convivial societies within a flourishing biosphere', which include respect for ancient and modern ways to work well with the planet and its resources. Next is David Stuckler, master navigator of Big Food, co-author of *Sick Societies*, a book whose title echoes Rudolf Virchow, who stated that epidemics are warning signs, symptoms of methods of governance that have gone wrong. Next is *Gerard Hastings* of the Institute of Social Marketing, whose Oxford presentation 'In praise of disobedience' calls for refusal to be lured by the siren songs of corporate capitalism, the transformation of consumers into citizens, and thus organising and working together in the common cause of planetary survival.

The next three, on the right, are campaigners and much more besides. They also let us know what has gone wrong and how to help create a good new world. *Alejandro Calvillo* of *El Poder del Consumidor* (Consumer Power), *celebrated earlier in Update,* based in Mexico, is leading the charge in Latin America against the ravages of Big Food penetration of the global South. David Sanders of the *People's Health Movement,* based in South Africa, respected at the highest levels within the UN system, denounces the penetration of transnational corporations into Africa and all other vulnerable regions of the world. Flavio Valente of *FIAN International,* based in Germany, upholder of the human right to adequate nourishing food, champions the entitlement of public interest organisations throughout the world to shape the November UN International Conference on Nutrition, and also its outcomes, on behalf of the populations and communities most affected.



Action at and after the Oxford meeting. The Randolph Summit to plan public interest organisation impact on ICN2 (left). Diana Parra of Straight Thinking outside The Lancet offices, London (right)

Conferences should be about moving from knowledge, to decisions and actions. This was a pledge of the *World Nutrition Rio2012* conference, confirmed as a commitment in September at the Oxford conference on food systems. Here are two outcomes.

One purpose of the Oxford conference has been to unify and strengthen the contribution of public interest organisations and social movements to the UN International Conference on Nutrition being held this November. So leaders based in Brazil, South Africa, the US, Germany and Mexico met at Oxford's historic Randolph Hotel to plan strategy and make agreements. From the left above are Fabio Gomes of the World Public Health Association (and *WN Big Food Watch*), Laura Michéle of FIAN International, David Sanders of the People's Health Movement, Enrique Jacoby of the Pan American Health Organization (an observer), Flavio Valente of FIAN International, and Alejandro Calvillo of *El Poder del Consumidor*. Plans for concerted work up to and beyond November were agreed.

The day after the Oxford conference Diana Parra (on the right, above), co-convenor with Thiago de Sá of *Straight Thinking*, a *Big Food Watch* initiative, travelled to London to meet and discuss plans with *The Lancet,* situated in Camden right by the Regent's Canal. *The Lancet* endorses and supports the plan, as explained to editors Richard Horton and Pam Das by Diana. This is to produce a manual for organisers of all types and sizes of conferences to enable them to create scientifically independent and materially successful meetings, fully funded from public sources, participants' subscriptions, and other appropriate unproblematic sources.

How to respond

Updates are short communications designed to add new information to *WN* commentaries and other contributions. They are invited from all readers. Updates are usually to *WN* contributions. Usual length is between 500 and 1,500 words. Any references should usually be limited to up to 10. *Updates* are edited, may be developed, and once edited are sent to authors for approval. Address contributions for publication to wn.updates@gmail.com