WN *The issue*

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Nutrition
Public health is political



Above: Nutrition is a political issue. Critics of sugar Gary Taubes, Robert Lustig, Michael Moss, and what sugar does to us. Second row: Mark Lawrence and Julie Woods on a food label scandal. Melanie Warner looks at food processing in the US including breakfast cereals aimed at children. Cicely Williams is the all-time public health nutrition hero. Feedback from Fred Kummerow, Walter Willett and Gyorgy Scrinis on trans-fats, and from Claudio Schuftan on the real Bill Gates

Editor's note

Our cover feature theme (top row above left), is that as part of public health, nutrition is political, as stated by the new Oslo-*Lancet* report on global health governance. This is the theme of our *Editorial.* In *Update* we continue our coverage of sugar, including its current antagonists **Gary Taubes, Robert Lustig**, and **Michael Moss**. *Update* also celebrates the new Brazilian dietary guidelines. Our *Big Food Watch* commentary by **Mark Lawrence** (second row) and **Julie Woods**, investigates why a front-label food product guide to health was suppressed by the Australian government. **Melanie Warner** visits the Big Breakfast at Battle Creek in her examination of food processing in the US. We continue our theme of nutrition as political in our Inspiration tribute to **Cicely Williams,** who diagnosed kwashiorkor and indicted artificial baby feeding. **Geoffrey Cannon**, meditative this month, thinks about the meaning of mango trees. In another bumper Feedback section, **Fred Kummerow**, **Walter Willett** and **Gyorgy Scrinis** write on implications of *trans* fats, and **Claudio Schuftan** explains philanthrocapitalism in his third look at **Bill Gates**, the man behind the benign mask.

Update. Global Commission on Global Governance for Health
Nutrition is a political issue



The Commission includes top row right, Paulo Buss. Second row two at right, Michael Marmot, Julio Frenk. Front row centre, Joahodhara Dasgupta (vice-chair), and Ole Petter Ottersen (chair)

The Issue team reports: *'Global Governance for Health'*, a joint initiative of the University of Oslo and the UK-based journal *The Lancet*, supported by background papers from the People's Health Movement, is now published. It will prove to be a massively influential pushback against the current still dominant ideology that preaches casino capitalism. Its findings and recommendations are *summarised and assessed in Update.* Here is an adjusted extract of what *The Lancet* has said about this rational, radical and progressive report, which will shape the thought, policies and actions of public health and nutrition professionals.

> One great gap in thinking about the future of health and wellbeing are the arrangements put in place to organise international institutions and policies to sustain the fortunes of societies. These arrangements are inherently political… They are about power. They are about elites. And they are about a rigid consensus among these powerful elites that prevents most attempts to question the norms on which political decisions are made….
>
> The Commission addresses seven political domains that shape health and contribute to inequity within populations: finance, intellectual property, trade and investment treaties, food, corporate activity, migration, and armed confl ict. It examines the obstacles to effective global governance for health. And it proposes mechanisms to improve the accountability of all those who influence health through these different sectors. These include better articulation of the way in which civil society engages in global policy.

Big Food Watch. Food labelling
Oz pols rocked by food star ban







Now they saw it, now they didn't. Centre, glimpse of the Australian health star rating label that got pulled off the government website. Right, Health Minister Fiona Nash in clarification mode

Mark Lawrence and Julie Woods report: *In our Big Food Watch commentary* in this issue of *WN* we tell some of the story that has destabilised the new right-wing pro-industry government of our country of Australia. It is about front-of-label nutritional information! Fame at last for public health nutrition! Those of us in the front lines here don't know whether to rage, cry, laugh, or put the boot in. All four, we guess.

Here is the story of Star*Gate. After long, long negotiations with all 'stakeholders', complete agreement was reached that consumers need a system of food labelling that is national, rational, simple and helpful. The compromise agreed, which fell short of a 'traffic-light' system that public health professionals wanted and the food manufacturers hated and nixed, you can see above, centre. Early in February the agreed system was posted on the Ministry's website… and then almost instantly was pulled off, but not before the Public Health Association of Australia secured some screen grabs. What happened was first explained as a uh, technical hitch. Relax!

This incredible excuse was then replaced by a glimpse of reality. It turned out that the chief of staff of Fiona Nash, Australia's Minister responsible for food regulation (above right) had ordered the black-out. It then also turned out that this fellow, before entering public service, had been the boss of Australian Public Affairs (APA), a public relations outfit that flacks for the Australian Beverages Council (meaning Schweppes, Pepsi and Coca-Cola), and for Mondelez (meaning Cadbury, Kraft, Nabisco, and Oreo cookies). He had of course relinquished this job, but still had shares in the company, of which his wife was now the boss!

Imagine! Opposition politicians have just loved this. Broadcast and print media continue to publish juicy details, in Australia and internationally. A total of 66 senior public health professionals have gone into denunciation mode. There is wild talk of the Australian government falling because of this preposterous hanky-panky. Meanwhile we love the comment from 'Ideasmith' in a string of comments following a newspaper feature. 'How I wish Australian politicians were made to wear suits with sponsor patches just like racing car drivers'.

Commentary. Ultra-processed products
Why the US diet became ready-to-snack



Melanie Warner's nationwide journey of exploration included the Big Breakfast at the Cereal Festival in 'Cereal City', Battle Creek, the US ready-to-eat breakfast cereal capital of the world

Melanie Warner writes: A number of years ago, I went to the supermarket and bought an overflowing armful of cereal boxes and cookie packages. I decided to test whether those expiration dates printed on packages actually meant anything. I tucked the boxes and crinkly bags away in my kitchen for nearly a year. The dates printed on the packages came and went, and when I opened them, my cereal and cookies looked and tasted perfectly normal, almost as if I'd just bought them. Much of my collected food stubbornly refused to decay, even after as many as six years. I wondered what had happened to this food to make it so eternal, so unappealing to the mould and bacteria that normally feast on ignored leftovers and baked goods. This prompted my book *Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over the American Meal,* now out in paperback. *My commentary is adapted from one of its chapters.*

Inspiration. Cicely Williams
The public health nutrition hero for all times



Cicely Williams caring for a malnourished child. She diagnosed kwashiorkor, denounced breast milk substitutes, and continues to inspire health professional organisations and social movements

Geoffrey Cannon writes: By all accounts so far, Cicely Williams is the public health nutrition hero for all times. A number of people tell about her story in *Inspiration in*

this issue of WN. Personally, Cicely Williams was heroic. Her response to prejudice, setbacks, disasters, attacks, poverty, persecution, imprisonment, was always courageous. She was a leader. She encouraged many thousands of families and students she worked with, and still inspires public health professionals and their organisations and movements. She spoke out. 'If you learn your nutrition from a biochemist' she said, 'you're not likely to learn how essential it is to blow a baby's nose before expecting him to suck'.

She has made three great contributions to child nutrition and health. One is from Ghana: her diagnosis of kwashiorkor and its positioning apparent in the name, as a social condition. One also is from Malaysia: her insistence on extended breastfeeding. One is from all her work: personally in her sympathy with the communities she worked with, expressed with love and care for children, and professionally in her creation of health centres using local resources that fostered mutual trust. Where are the indomitable leaders and inspirers now, who will protect public health and public goods? Meanwhile we all can learn from Cicely Williams. This means action.

What do you think? Nourishment
Meditation on a mango tree



Indian homage to the mango tree and its fruit. Food, and most of all that which has been cultivated throughout history and is part of a people's culture, nourishes the body, and mind, heart and spirit

Geoffrey Cannon writes: In my column this issue of WN I think about one abiding theme. This is the relationship between nutrition and nourishment. Best to avoid being abstract, so I focus on mango trees. They live for about 300 years. The name of their fruit is a Tamil word. We have one in our garden in Ogiva, a suburb of Cabo Frio, on the Rio de Janeiro state coast, where Amerigo Vespucci landed in 1503. Here is where the brasil tree from which this country gets its name was first exploited.

Mango trees are not native to Brazil. Those in Brazil come from India, where they are the national fruit. Around 35 million tonnes are now produced every year. They were brought to Brazil by seafarers and settlers from the Portuguese colonies in India including Goa and Macau.

It is not by chance or whim that the mango tree is the national tree of India. Nor is this a mere symbol in the sense we mostly understand. In the countries where it originated, the tree is a source of life. Religions based on nature venerates tree that are home and nourishment for insects, birds and animals, and whose cool shade shelters crops. But there is more. They are big bushy trees. In Indian villages they are the place where, in the evenings in the shade, the community meets to share experiences, report news, and make decisions. It is natural for villagers to feel that the mango tree under which they and their ancestors have gathered, embodies the spirit of their place.

Feedback. Trans-fats. Partial hydrogenation
The world is watching the US FDA



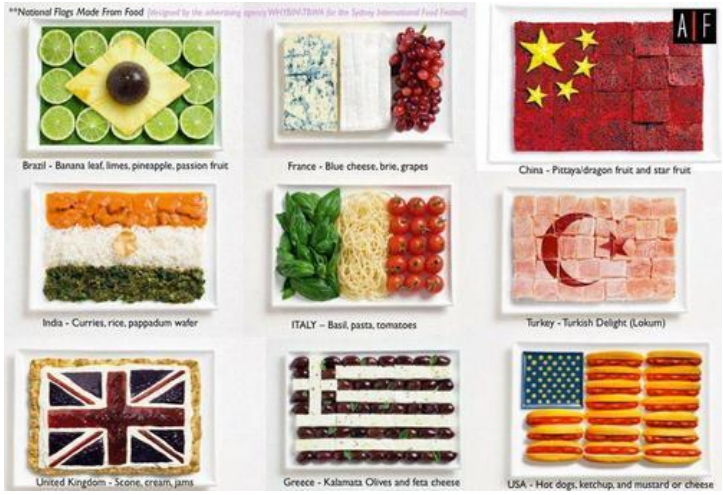
Fred Kummerow, the man in blue (left), is sueing the US FDA, specifically the women with the red background (right), Margaret Hamburg and her boss in the Obama cabinet Kathleen Sebelius

Isabela Sattamini writes: *In this issue we have letters* from Fred Kummerow (above, left), Walter Willett and Gyorgy Scrinis on trans fats, and Claudio Schuftan's third examination of Bill Gates and his Foundation. Here is how Fred Kummerow's letter begins:

Fred Kummerow writes: The US Food and Drug Administration has given the food manufacturing industry another 60 days to respond to their intention to withdraw the classification 'generally recognised as safe' from *trans*-fats. The comment period now ends on 7 March. If and when this action is at last taken, *trans*-fats will in due course effectively be eliminated from the US food supply. Last August I filed a lawsuit against the US Food and Drug Administration, specifically addressing FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg and her boss the Department of Health and Human Services secretary Kathleen Sebelius (right hand picture, above). This states

that the FDA's failure to ban the use of partially hydrogenated oils containing artificial *trans* fat in food for human consumption, is unlawful. This is not a matter for the food product manufacturing industry. The prime duty of the FDA is to protect public health. That is what it is there for. *Trans* fats are a prime cause of cardiac deaths. The less industrially generated *trans* fats there are in food supplies the better, true – but there is no safe upper limit. *Trans*-fats, and so the partial hydrogenation process that generates *trans*-fats, must be totally eliminated from food supplies in the US, and worldwide, by law.

Network. Emblematic food
Enjoy your flag



Fabio Gomes writes: We present these national flags made from emblematic national food, as a wonderful and joyful idea. From top left, these ones are Brazil (banana leaf, limes, pineapple, passion fruit). France (blue cheese, brie cheese and grapes); China (dragon fruit and star fruit); India (curries, rice, pappadum wafer), Italy (*as featured in Network*, basil, pasta, tomatoes); Turkey (delight); the UK (scone, cream, jam); Greece (olives and feta cheese); and the US (hot dogs, ketchup, mustard).

Status

The issue is reviewed by members of the editorial team. Readers may use material here if acknowledgement is given to the Association, and *WN* is cited. Please cite as: Anon. Nutrition. Public health is political. [The issue] *World Nutrition* March 2014, **5**, 3, 201-207. Obtainable at www.wphna.org/worldnutrition. Contributions to *World Nutrition* are the copyright and responsibility of their authors. They should not be taken to be the view or policy of the World Public Health Nutrition Association (the Association) or of any affiliated or associated bodies, unless this is explicitly stated.