WN *The issue*

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Working for a better world
Equitable new year!



Above: Some of the BFW team: Fabio Gomes, Jeanette Longfield, Tim Lobstein, Flavio Valente, Michael Jacobson, Alejandro Calvillo, Elisabetta Recine, and (next row, left) Claudio Schuftan. Plus: Isabela Sattamini, Gyorgy Scrinis, Rudolf Virchow, Francis I, Colin Tudge, Pablo Neruda

Editor's note

As you see from our cover picture, our best new year wishes are for the children who are our future. *Big Food Watch* convenor **Fabio Gomes** (top row, left) is joined by *BFW* team members: left to right, Jeanette Longfield (Sustain), Tim Lobstein (International Obesity Task Force), Flavio Valente (FoodFirst Action Network), Michael Jacobson (Center for Science in the Public Interest), Alejandro Calvillo (El Poder del Consumidor), Elisabetta Recine (Brazilian Council of Food and Nutrition Security), Claudio Schuftan (People's Health Movement). We watch Big Food in *Updates* on the case against added sugars, and in a *BFW* commentary on Coca-Cola CEO Muhtar Kent's plan to start to fix water-borne diseases, beginning in Africa.

Isabela Sattamini (second row) in *Update*, also explains why the heat is now on sugar. Our main commentary, on the margarine-hydrogenation-*trans*-fat fiasco, is by **Gyorgy Scrinis** (next to Isabela). In *Inspiration* **Geoffrey Cannon** suggests that Rudolf Virchow (centre) is a founding father of public health nutrition; and also hymns Pope Francis I. In *Feedback* **Colin Tudge** shows why family farmers can feed the 10+ billion. *Network* features an elemental ode by **Pablo Neruda** (right) praising conger chowder.



Big Food Watch

The Big Food Watch team writes:

Why the series of contributions in *WN* on *Big Food Watch*, outlining the strategies and actions of transnational food and drink product manufacturers, caterers and their associates? We hope the answer is obvious. All of us engaged in public health and nutrition (and in a real sense all thinking people, not only professionals), need to know what are the main forces shaping global, national and local dietary patterns – what populations eat and drink, and the reasons why. Corporate websites and the industry press make clear that a main aim of transnational corporations is deeply to penetrate the global South, with the effect of displacing traditional healthy and sustainable food systems. This is a strategy that the *BFW* team is watching.

The tide seems to be turning against added sugars and syrups

Update this month carries a series of stories with the same message. The Credit Suisse bank*, PLoS Medicine*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, are all independently stating what may amount to an unstoppable case against sugars and syrups in the quantity added to ultra-processed products. For many years now, sugar has been identified as the principal dietary cause of tooth decay, and of obesity only inasmuch as it contributes to excess dietary energy. Now though, in the words of WHO advisor and cardiologist Srinath Reddy, founder-director of the Public Health Foundation of India: 'There is overwhelming evidence coming out about sugar-sweetened beverages and other sugar consumption links with obesity, diabetes, and even cardiovascular disease'.

Coca-Cola's vision to conquer water-borne diseases



Coca-Cola chief executive officer Muhtar Kent (above, left) has a vision. He wants to put the Coca-Cola corporation to work, to help to conquer the water-borne diseases estimated to kill over 2 million people every year, especially in Asia and Africa, and other impoverished parts of the world, most of whom are young

children. *Our Big Food Watch commentary* this issue tells the story of an extraordinary business partnership led by Coca-Cola. The O'Neill Institute for Global Health Law explains: 'The cola giant plans to launch 150 Ekocenters offering internet, water, and electricity. Features include solar panels for power, a satellite dish for wireless communication, and a Slingshot water distiller'. The Slingshot™, created by engineer and inventor Dean Kamen (above, right) and his team, named with David and Goliath in mind, is designed to supply guaranteed clean water and thus prevent sickness and death directly caused by pathogenic microbes. So it's all happening, with the full roll-out projected by the end of 2015. Who is paying? Curiously, this is not yet clear, A Coca-Cola representative says that the business model is not yet worked out. Why 'Ekocenters™' with a 'k'? Answer: spelled backwards, the first four letters are 'Coke'.

Editor's note



Big Food Watch is now a regular series in *WN*. Convenor is *WN* Assistant Editor Fabio Gomes. He was a member of the programme committee for the *Rio2012* conference held in April 2012. He is an experienced public health nutritionist from the global South, already networked with civil society and public interest leaders and organisations worldwide. Like all contributions to *WN, Big Food Watch* expresses the views of its authors, and should not be taken to be the policy or view of the World Public Health Nutrition Association (the Association) except when this is explicitly stated.

Brazil is a good centre for this work. The country is now a participatory democracy whose public officials work in partnership with civil society organisations in framing and operating policies and programmes designed to prevent and control all forms of malnutrition. Brazil is also called an 'emerging market economy'. Like other countries in the global South it has a growing middle class, and like them its food systems, and patterns of diet and nutrition, health and disease, are transforming because of the entry of international food product manufacturers, retailers and 'fast food' chains. The result, often welcomed as a sign of 'development', impacts on agriculture, land use, water resources, rural and urban employment, food culture, and family life. A specific effect is to displace freshly prepared meals with ready-to-consume processed products.

The task of *Big Food Watch* is to do as its name implies – to observe the activities most of all of transnational food and drink product corporations. Much corporate activity takes place behind closed doors or in the shadows, unseen by policy-makers, opinion-formers, other professionals, or citizens. *Big Food Watch* will try to open doors and let in light.

The issues raised by *Big Food Watch* are liable to be controversial. Certainly, they are matters on which different opinions will be held. Much of the information in *BFW* contributions is taken from corporate websites and also from the industry trade press. We believe there is need for more knowledge, and for vigorous debate on the effect of the policies and actions of very large corporations with a global reach on public health and nutrition, worldwide, nationally and locally. The *BFW* team will give credit when this is due, and *WN* vigorously encourages responses from all reasonable points of view.

Nutritionism. Butter, margarine and trans-fats
The trouble with margarine



Advertisements for margarine with trans-fats dating from 1954 (Rita Hayworth and Sunnybank) and 1978 (Miracle). Centre is a hydrogenation reactor newly made in China for delivery to India

The Issue editors write: What if saturated fats of animal origin from fresh foods were never a main cause of heart disease? Such an idea is still usually regarded as preposterous, even outrageous, and contradicted by massive evidence. But there is a confounding factor, which some specialists now agree modifies the saturated fat thesis. This is *trans*-fats, which for a century have been part of a great range of baked and snack products, and hard margarine, as a result of the hydrogenation process.

Trans-fats are the topic of our commentary on *'Margarine, butter, and the trans-fats fiasco'* Author Gyorgy Scrinis challenges the paradigm still determining nutrition science, which is that the quality of food can and should be assessed in terms of its chemical composition – its macro- and micronutrients. He identified this as the fallacy of 'nutritionism'. His thesis became popularised by Michael Pollan in *In Defense of Food.*

Gyorgy Scrinis writes:

'The take-home message of this *trans*-fats fiasco could be that we should place our trust in cows rather than chemists. In my commentary I trace the transformation of the public profile and nutritional facade of margarine from a cheap imitation of butter to a "hyper-real" spread boasting a superior fatty acid profile, and then to a cholesterol-lowering and omega-3-enriched functional food. I also examine how the discourse of good and bad fats continues to obscure the underlying ingredients and processing quality of margarine and other spreads'.

Editor's note

Gyorgy Scrinis is a lecturer in food and nutrition politics and policy in the School of Land and Environment at the University of Melbourne, Australia. His website is www.gyorgyscrinis.com. His commentary is edited and adapted from a chapter in his book *Nutritionism. The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice*, published in the US by Columbia University Press

What do you think?
Food technology: servant or master



Above: one of the principles of the New Nutrition, agreed at Giessen by an expert group in 2005. These outline nutrition as a social, economic and environmental as well as a biological discipline

What do you think? columnist Geoffrey Cannon writes:

The world's food systems, in the global South as well as the North, are increasingly industrialised. This process, begun in England 200 years ago, is more or less complete in 'market economies'. Beginning around 1980, the main business of transnational food and drink produce corporations increasingly has been and is displacement of traditional food systems, and dietary patterns centred on freshly prepared dishes and meals, with ready-to-consume branded ultra-processed products. This strategy is stated on corporate websites and in the business media.

Almost all food and drink is processed in some way. Some food processes, ancient and modern, such as drying, pasteurisation and freezing, are harmless or benign. Others, such as salt-pickling, hydrogenation and sugaring, are harmful or malign. But unlike food scientists and technologists, most nutrition scientists pay little attention to food processing as such, and to the varying effects of types of processing on human health – not to mention on family life, rural livelihoods and non-renewable resources including in China, India, Asia as a whole and Africa. One activist writer and speaker who stands out is Francis Moore Lappé of *Diet for a Small Planet*. A scientist who has warned of the dangers of a world in which food technology (and other forms of technology) become the master and not the servant wisely engaged, is the Canadian organic chemist Ross Hume Hall (1926-2003) of McMaster University, Canada, author of *Food for Nought*.

Anon. Working for an better world. Equitable new year!

Feedback. Agriculture

Who to believe on the future of farming



UK chief scientist John Beeddington (top left) believes in biotechnology as the way to feed the world. But evidence convinces Robert Watson and Hans Herren (below) that there is already enough food

The Issue editors write: In our *Feedback* section, Colin Tudge *contributes a long letter* which amounts to a reasoned peroration against agricultural biotechnology and for family farming. He says: 'The *real* point behind genetically modified organisms is to achieve the combination of corporate and big government complete control of all agriculture… This Big Tech agriculture would be geared not to general well-being but to the maximisation of profit and power for a tiny elite of rich and powerful people and their courtiers, mostly from the global North'. Former UK chief scientist John Beddington, the man in the funny hat in the picture top, left, believes that biotechnology is essential to feed a growing global population.

Colin Tudge continues: 'Others, including some far more professional and who have far more knowledge and insight, tell a different story. In 2009 the Washington DC-based International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development produced its 600 page report which took three years and involved 400 specialists in 110 countries'. Leaders of the initiative included Robert Watson, formerly of the World Bank, and Hans Herren of the Millennium Institute, pictured above. 'The report was not cooked up to follow a pre-determined recipe. It points out that the world already produces enough staple food to support 14 billion – twice the present number. A billion are now food- and nutrition insecure, of whom many starve, because the wrong food is produced in the wrong places by the wrong means by the wrong people – and once the food is produced, half of it is wasted'.

Colin Tudge concludes: 'The UN demographers state that although human numbers are rising, the *rate of the rise* is going down and should reach zero by 2050 – so the numbers should level out. Nine and a half billion is predicted to be the maximum – and 50 per cent more than will ever be needed is already produced. So here we have equally simple arithmetic with a totally different conclusion. The task is not to increase output, but to produce what is already produced (or even less) by means that are kinder to people, livestock, and wildlife; more sustainable; and more resilient'.

Network. Pablo Neruda
The alchemy of food



Pablo Neruda with Pablo Picasso (left). Some of his books (centre). Receiving his Nobel prize (right). Much of his poetry is about the air, earth, water, fire, and the food that comes from them

Network editor Fabio Gomes writes:

Healthy food systems nourish the body, and the mind, heart and soul, and therefore become hymned. Some of the best poems written in my continent of Latin America celebrate meals enjoyed in company. Some are by the Chilean Nobel prize-winner Pablo Neruda, whose affinity with the common people of his country is expressed in his epic *Canto General*, and also in his 'elemental odes'. *In this issue we feature his ode* to conger chowder, in which 'are warmed the essences of Chile, and to the table come, newly wed, the savours of land and sea, so that in this dish, you may know heaven'.

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. Working for a better world. Equitable new year! [The issue] *World Nutrition* January 2014, **5**,1, 1-7. 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.