WN *Big Food Watch*

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Commentary. Big Food Watch

Words for our sponsors



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'Taints the science… and weakens the trust decision-makers might reasonably put in that science'. This statement by *The Lancet* editor Richard Horton (1) was published on 30 November. It sharply criticises the prominent presence of the transnational Big Food corporations Nestlé, Danone and Novo Nordisk, in an international public health meeting with important nutritional aspects, and also criticises the conference organisers for letting this happen. The issue he raises is one of the concerns of *Big Food Watch*. This commentary, written on behalf of the Big Food Watch team, includes the results of the poll team members took on the occasion of the 20th International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) held in Granada in September. Many

sessions were sponsored, organised and effectively controlled by Big Food. We have polled some speakers at the congress and asked for their opinions.

World Nutrition, and also *Public Health Nutrition*, has carried a number of commentaries and editorials on the relationship between nutrition professionals and congresses, and that section of the food industry whose profits and products are against the interests of public health, often known as 'conflicted industry'. These pieces are usually critical. Among the concerns for the nutrition profession are:

- Big Food uses its links with scientists and officials to distort science, confuse professionals and public, provoke false debates, and distort reputations.
- The public, the media, and policy-makers, are unlikely to believe or respect information or advice that is the product of links with conflicted industry.
- The need for science to be funded from independent sources is jeopardised when conflicted industry is allowed and encouraged to support scientists.
- In summary, overt or covert links with conflicted industry are against the interests of public health and public goods, and also the nutrition profession.

With such considerations no doubt in mind, a multi-authored paper published in *The Lancet* in February 2013, in the series on prevention and control of chronic non-communicable diseases, concluded: 'Funding and other support for research, education, and programmes should not be accepted from the tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and drinks industries or their affiliates and associates' (2).

In June 2013, World Health Organization director-general Margaret Chan said, at a world public health conference (3): 'It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics… These… include front groups, lobbies, promises of self-regulation, lawsuits, and industry-funded research that confuse the evidence and keep the public in doubt… Market power readily translates into political power. Few governments prioritize health over big business. As we learned from experience with the tobacco industry, a powerful corporation can sell the public just about anything'. Her list might also have included the funding of and influence on universities and research centres and their departments and scientists, and overt and covert funding, other material support and often control, of scientific journals, papers and conferences.

At the Granada ICN, held in association with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS), there was *far more conflicted industry presence* than at any previous ICN. A fairly reliable rumour is that the net surplus of the congress is around €700,000 (much the same in $US) some of which goes to the local organisers and much to IUNS. It was a good opportunity to ask participants what they thought, and to put the links between the nutrition profession and Big Food into a general context.

The rise of a colossal industry

Box 1

What is 'Big Food'?



BIG FOOD WATCH

'Big Food' refers to the class of food and drink product manufacturers and caterers that have become colossal in particular since the 1980s, and also to corporate commodity traders, suppliers, associated industry such as ingredients and additives manufacturers, and the organisations they have set up and control to represent their collective interests (4).

Colossal size and scope

'Big Science' was the first enterprise to be named in this way, following vast capital expenditure on research beginning in the 1940s with the Manhattan Project that constructed the first atomic bomb, and continuing with initiatives such as Star Wars in the US and the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) (5).

This 'big' concept developed as from the 1980s with the creation and very rapid growth of transnational industries. These are a product of what is still the prevailing political and economic ideology. This is enforced by legally binding trade and other agreements that enable and encourage minimally regulated highly capitalised corporations to do business in and from anywhere in the world, and to 'open up' countries where materials and labour are cheapest and national governments are most accommodating.

Although headquartered in one place, transnationals do not identify with any country. They employ executives from many countries, and operate globally. They can and do act with minimal restriction in all ways that maximise their power and profits, as did the East India Companies in an earlier period of unrestrained corporate growth (6). 'The transnational company is not totally beyond the control of national governments. It must adapt to them. But these adaptations are exceptions to policies and practices decided on for worldwide markets and technologies' (7). Big Pharma, Big Tobacco, Big Alcohol and Big Food corporations are now usually almost by definition transnational. Other more specific terms sometimes used are 'Big Snack', Big Soda', and 'Big Sugar'.

Leading transnational corporations have turnovers equal to the gross national products of middle size countries. Big Food corporations include Nestlé, PepsiCo, Kraft Foods, Coca-Cola, Unilever, Mars, Danone, McDonald's and Yum! Brands. Big Drink includes Anheuser-Busch AmBev, SAB Miller, Heineken, Suntory and Diageo. Associated corporations include commodity traders such as Archer Daniels Midland and Cargill, and agrichemical, ingredient and additive manufacturers such as Monsanto, Dow, DSM and various Big Pharma firms.

Big Food also includes trade organisations, foundations, institutes and non-profit bodies set up by and wholly or predominately controlled by Big Food and allied corporations. Some of these have the name of the corporation as part of the title. Others, including those that are

set up and controlled by consortia of corporations, such as the International Food Information Council and the International Life Sciences Institute (8,9), do not.

Big Food transnational and other corporations are competitive with one another within any product range – soft drinks, say, or burgers, snack products, beer, additives – but combine and 'run as a pack' to promote and defend their common interests. They form alliances and create front organisations to thwart statutory regulation or any other impediment of any of their activities and practices.

Collectively they make up practically all of the 'private sector' that the United Nations and its relevant agencies, regulatory bodies, and national governments, wrongly identify as representing the interests of the industry as a whole. The 'public-private partnerships' set up to negotiate, agree and enact policies that shape food systems and supplies and dietary patterns are grossly imbalanced. This is because the responsibility of those concerned with the public interest is broad, whereas the agenda of the 'private partners' is predominately or solely to promote and protect the commercial interests of one almighty industry sector whose profits depend on unhealthy products – Big Food.

Big Food has so far largely succeeded in setting and running the current international public health nutrition agenda. So far this limits changes in food supplies to reductions in salt and *trans*-fatty acids, together with some reformulation of energy-dense fatty, sugary or salty ready-to-consume products. Big Food has also so far been generally successful in distracting attention away from its more predatory or destructive practices, such as those that cause degradation of soil, pollution of oceans, depletion of water, exhaustion of non-renewable energy sources, distortion of national and local economies, loss of rural employment, and ruin of smaller businesses.

Pathogenic products

All these general practices would make Big Food not greatly different from transnational industries in other areas such as energy, transport, or indeed other consumer goods. The specific issue as indicated above, is that the profits of Big Food depend on ultra-processed products that are intrinsically unhealthy, with or without reformulation (10-12).

An explanation of why appeared in the February 2013 *Lancet* paper (2): 'Ultra-processed products are made from processed substances extracted or refined from whole foods, such as oils, hydrogenated oils and fats, flours and starches, variants of sugar, and cheap parts or remnants of animal foods, with little or no whole foods. Products include burgers, frozen pizza and pasta dishes, nuggets and sticks, crisps, biscuits, confectionery, cereal bars, carbonated and other sugared drinks, and various snack products'.

'Most are made, advertised, and sold by large or transnational corporations and are very durable, palatable, and ready to consume, which is an enormous commercial advantage over fresh and perishable whole or minimally processed foods. Consequently, their production and consumption is rising quickly worldwide' (2).

The *Lancet* paper also states that the impact of Big Food is greatest in the global South. 'In the global North, as in North America and Europe, ultra-processed products have largely replaced food systems and dietary patterns based on fresh and minimally processed food and culinary ingredients that have less fat, sugar, and salt. In the global South, as in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, ultra-processed products are displacing established dietary patterns, which are more suitable socially and environmentally' (2).

The context of collaboration

Commentators on Big Food infiltration of nutrition congresses make a basic mistake, when they do not put this activity in context. As Margaret Chan indicates (3), it is part of a comprehensive strategy, which has much in common with that of Big Tobacco. It includes Big Food influence on relevant UN agencies; 'close links' with national government politicians and officials; and strong influence on international nutrition, food safety and trade organisations, and their policies and practices. Those on the receiving end are complicit in this process when they espouse 'public-private partnerships' as in the interests of 'the market' and of economic growth. Margaret Chan speaks out against the process. She is unusual. Most people who are opposed to what Big Food is doing, remain quiet.

Critics of Big Food involvement with nutrition congresses make an even more basic mistake, when they assume that the nutrition profession in general is aware of and opposed to the ill-effects of transnational Big Food corporations on public health. This is not the case. Influential nutritionists concerned with the alleviation of under-nutrition in the South, work with corporations whose products provide 'quick energy' to undernourished children. Many nutrition professionals have worked, do work, or may work, for conflicted industry or associated organisations. Nutrition congresses become recruitment offices for people needing a job. And in most countries now, much if not most nutrition research, especially in 'mature market economies' like North America and Western Europe, is funded at least in part by industry. People usually do not bite the hand that feeds them.

Also, as part of the general position that biological sciences are 'hard', nutrition professionals often think in terms of seeking an objective 'truth', and that as scientists, their findings and conclusions will not be diverted or subverted by the source of their funds. They therefore tend to feel that their integrity is attacked by any suggestion that their work is liable to be affected by association with Big Food.

Further, like most people, most nutritionists, individually and collectively, are not 'political'. Like medical professionals, they mostly do not, as do public health professionals, consider the deeper and wider implications of their work, or the basic and underlying social, economic, political and environmental drivers of food systems and dietary patterns. It is natural to appreciate 'free' travel and accommodation, meeting new people, and considering new opportunities, for their research and themselves. Our general impression is that most 'attendees' are 'uncomfortable' with the idea that nutrition congresses are infiltrated by industries whose interests undermine those of nutrition. People like 'free' lunches, even when as at Granada these take the form of a cabin class-style bubble-tray of greasy sandwiches, branded drinks, and the inevitable shiny apple.

The context of Granada: 1



BIG FOOD WATCH

Digest 1

American Society for Nutrition



Sharon Donovan, Connie Weaver, Lindsay Allen, past presidents of ASN; and David Allison, member of its council. All spoke at Granada events sponsored and controlled by industry

The American Society for Nutrition (ASN) is the leading body representing the nutrition profession in the US. It is safe to say that most influential nutritionists in the US belong to the ASN. It also has an international branch. In the view of Angel Gil, president of the ICN held in Granada, 'ASN is by far the most important organization in nutrition worldwide'. Perhaps he meant most powerful, internationally as well as nationally. The ASN is a constituent body of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), positioned as the representative organisation for 'biological and biomedical researchers'. The FASEB annual meetings incorporate the annual ASN meetings (13).

ASN is the 'adhering body' of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, which tends to have a couple of its Council members from the US. Previous US Council members included Lindsay Allen, a former ASN president (above). Current US IUNS council members are the distinguished scientist Reynaldo Martorell, a former president of the Society for International Nutrition Research, now merged into ASN, and Lynette Neufeld of the Micronutrient Initiative, a director of the Gates-funded Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

ASN in brief

ASN was founded in 1928 as the American Institute for Nutrition. It states that it is 'a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing together the world's top researchers, clinical nutritionists and industry to advance our knowledge and application of nutrition for the sake of humans and animals.' The statement continues: 'Through excellence in nutrition research and practice, ASN's members enhance scientific knowledge and quality of life. The Society supports its members and fulfills its mission by… providing opportunities for fellowship and support among nutritionists; and bringing scientific knowledge to bear on nutrition issues through communication and influence in the public domain'. ASN journals are the *Journal of Nutrition*, the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, and *Advances in Nutrition*. (13).

The American Way

The culture of the ASN is that of the US. With important exceptions, influential people in government and science in the US have always seen collaboration and partnership with industry as an opportunity, as part of the 'American Way' of fostering enterprise and initiative. The US presidential candidate that wins is normally the one with the most amount of money to spend on the electoral campaign. Blatant conflicts of interest, as with the arms industry, tend to be played down. In this respect, current regulation of the use of and exposure to tobacco in the US is a remarkable public health achievement, as are the current relatively enlightened US policies and programmes that encourage breastfeeding.

A vital practical consideration is money for the funding of research. Former ASN president Sharon Donovan makes a practical point. 'How do we fund our research in the current economic climate? In order to help our members continue their work at a time when federal funding is dwindling, ASN is providing opportunities for our younger members to improve their grantsmanship in order to help them to put together the most competitive applications possible. We also hope to help them look for alternative sources of funding. With that goal, we must consider how best to partner with industry more extensively in a way that can benefit our members without subjecting them to criticism for those interactions' (14).

US federal and state funding of science from public sources continues to be cut, relatively and absolutely. This is because of the continued economic crisis following the collapse of the US and international banking systems, and also because of the prevailing belief that private funding is essential as a test that research is fit for purpose. In this context, more and more funding for nutrition and associated research, and more generally for university and research centres and departments, comes from gigantic non-profits such as the Gates Foundation, and also directly from Big Food corporations or their associated foundations. Deans compete for such funding as evidence of effectiveness in the academic and research market. This philosophy has a deep background. The US land colleges, now grown into powerful universities such as Cornell, were originally funded by the US government to serve the agricultural industry. As another example, Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, has been granted endowments over the decades from the profits of Coca-Cola, now valued at $US 5 billion, the university is sited on land donated by Coca-Cola, and Emory professorships are named after Robert W Woodruff, Coca-Cola president from 1923 to 1955 (15).

The ASN and Big Food

The American Society for Nutrition states that it is committed to sound objective science in the interests of human and animal health. Its mission statements do not include wider considerations. In the context outlined above, the ASN welcomes support from commercial 'sustaining partners' The ASN states that 'the Sustaining Partners are represented in the Society by a Sustaining Partner Round-table. The members of this round-table help to provide visibility within ASN to matters of interest to industry by exchanging ideas and providing corporate financial support for the society's activities in education/training, scientific programs and professional outreach' (13).

As of 2013, ASN Sustaining Partners were transnational or other very large Big Good and Big Pharma corporations. They include Abbott Nutrition, the Beef Checkoff. Coca-Cola, the Dairy Research Institute, DSM, General Mills, Hillshire Brands, Kellogg's, Kraft, Mars, McCormick, McDonald's. Mead Johnson Nutrition, PepsiCo, Pharmavite, Pfizer, the Sugar Association, Tate & Lyle, and Unilever (13).

Granada. The sponsorship deal



BIG FOOD WATCH

Box 2

Granada. Selling nutrition to Big Food

This is an extract from the official invitation, 'Why Should You Be a Sponsor?' (16). It was devised by the organisers of the XX International Congress of Nutrition held in Granada in September 2013 in association with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences. It can be accessed on the official conference website at http://icn2013.com/pages/ exhibition_sponsorships/sponsorships. Access the pdf here

Why should you Sponsor?

A tailored sponsorship package of the Congress is a cost-effective opportunity to reach a large number of delegates within your target market.

Sponsorship is a proven tactic for marketing your brand: it combines the reach of magazine advertising with the power of direct mail and persuasion of face-to-face meeting, exposing your company directly to it's target market.

Congress participants are keen to improve their scientific knowledge. Involving your company with this powerful educational experience demonstrates your commitment to assisting their personal development.

Your company will benefit significantly from exposure to an interested, relevant and influential audience in an informal yet informative environment away from the competition of everyday distractions.

Key benefits to early commitment. Aligning your company early will ensure maximum exposure for your brand and increased opportunities to access not only the registered delegates but anyone receiving Congress printed or electronic marketing information, and first choice of sponsorship opportunities to ensure alignment with your marketing aims.

Sponsors will be invited to custom design their sponsorship package from the wide range of opportunities that have been outlined to ensure the package meets your specific marketing needs. Any additional ideas that you may have to promote your products and services are very welcome for consideration by the Organizing Committee.

Sponsorship Levels

Platinum Sponsor:	75.000 €
Gold Sponsor:	60.000€
Silver Sponsor:	40.000 €
General Sponsor	< 40.000 €

To see a complete detail of the Sponsorship Opportunities please view the Exhibitors' Manual by clicking on *http://icn2013.com/pages/exhibition_sponsorships/sponsorships.*

Granada. The Big Food sessions

At Granada there were 39 sessions identified as sponsored, mostly organised and funded by Big Food. All sessions that took place between 17.00 and 19.00 on every day were of this type, far more than at any previous ICN. There were around 200 convenors, chairpeople and speakers *identified in the programme* as being engaged in these sessions (17). Of these we chose 18 speakers to poll.



BIG FOOD WATCH

Box 3

Granada. Sponsored sessions and speakers

This is a selection of 9 sessions of 39 and 18 speakers of around 200.

Nestlé
Public-private partnership in nutrition
Zulfiqar Bhutta, Massimo Massi-Benedetti, others

General Mills
Food choices to avoid obesity
Antonia Trichopoulou, Arne Astrup, others

Danone
Yoghurt in nutrition
Andrew Prentice, Nicole Darmon, others

Ajinimoto
Umami taste compounds
Martin Yeomans, Adam Drewnowski, others

Deoleo
Monounsaturated fatty acids and health
Dariush Mozaffarian, Francisco Perez Jimenez, others

Tate & Lyle
Emerging fibres
Joanne Slavin, Connie Weaver, others

Coca-Cola
Physical activity
Steven Blair, Michael Pratt, others

Puleva
Omega-3 fatty acids
Ricardo Uauy, Philip Calder, others

Beer and health
Beer and the Mediterranean diet
Lluis Serra Majem, Rosa Ortega Anta, others

Granada. Our poll of speakers: 1



One of the two Danone sessions at the ICN Granada. Sharon Donovan, former president of the American Society for Nutrition, was co-chair (centre left). Andrew Prentice was a speaker (far left).

Pictured above is one of the industry-organised and -sponsored two-hour parallel sessions that took place every day between 17.00 and 19.00. (17). This one was in a room holding 320 people, whose price was €11,000, plus the cost of speakers and chairpeople. Speakers (two at the left) were Andrew Prentice of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Nicole Darmon of INSERM, Marseilles, France, and (two at the right) Arne Astrup of the University of Copenhagen, former president of the International Association for the Study of Obesity, and David McCarron of the University of California (Davis). Chairs (the two at the centre) were Sharon Donovan, former president of the American Society for Nutrition, billed in the programme as from the Danone Institute International, and Luis Moreno of the University of Zaragoza, Spain. The picture was found on the Danone website.

The industry sponsors effectively controlled as well as funded their sessions, subject to nominal approval by the 'congress Organiser'. Whether this 'organiser' was the local scientific organising committee chaired by congress president Ángel Gil, or whether it was the professional organisers whose job was to maximise revenue and profit of the congress, was not clear from the programme, and we invite clarification. The sponsors were mostly corporations whose profits come mainly from fatty, sugary, salty or other ultra-processed products, including commercial bread and cereal products, and alcoholic drinks, or from ingredients for such products, or else were organisations set up to represent the interests of these corporations.

Of the 18 speakers approached, 8 responded to our enquiry, as shown and summarised below. So the result should be taken only as an indication of what speakers organised and supported by industry feel about this practice. We thank the speakers who did respond. We noticed that some speakers were surprised to be approached, and some of these may have felt that our enquiry was not appropriate.



Eight speakers at industry-controlled and -funded sessions: Andrew Prentice, Martin Yeomans, Francesco Perez Jimenez, Connie Weaver, Steven Blair, Ricardo Uauy, Lluis Serra, Joanne Slavin

Andrew Prentice of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and winner of the American Society for Nutrition 'Volunteer of the Year' award in 2013, spoke at 'Yogurt in nutrition: initiative for a balanced diet', at a Danone session. Danone products include baby formula and milk and dairy products.

Martin Yeomans of the department of experimental psychology at the University of Sussex, UK, spoke on 'Sensory-enhancement of appetite and satiety', at an Ajinomoto session. Ajinomoto is the world's leading manufacturer of aspartame.

Francisco Perez Jimenez of the University of Cordoba, Spain, spoke on the health benefits of olive oil, at a Deoleo session. Deoleo is the world's leading olive oil corporation.

Connie Weaver of Purdue University, USA, spoke on the 'Nutrition and health benefits of emerging fibres', at a Tate & Lyle session. Tate & Lyle is one of the world's leading refiners of sugar cane.

Steven Blair of the University of South Carolina, USA, spoke on 'Active healthy living and prevention of chronic diseases', at a Coca-Cola funded- and -organised session. Coca-Cola is the world's leading manufacturer of sugared soft drinks.

Ricardo Uauy of the University of Chile and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, spoke at sessions organised by Puleva, the milk and dairy corporation; Choices International, an initiative led by Unilever to label selected ultra-processed products as healthy; Deoleo; and Sight & Life, set up by DSM, the leading global producer of various additives, ingredients and vitamins.

Lluis Serra Majem of the University of Las Palmas, Spain, spoke on beer and the Mediterranean diet, a *Cerveza y Salud* session. 'Beer and health' is created and controlled by brewers to 'promote research on the nutritional properties of the moderate consumption of beer and its relationship with health'. He was also a speaker in a European Hydration Institute session, itself funded by Coca-Cola.

Joanne Slavin of the University of Minnesota, USA, also spoke at the Tate & Lyle session on 'Nutrition and health benefits of emerging fibres'.

Here is the poll and the speakers' answers

1. Nutrition conferences are often organised with support from international and other large food and drink product manufacturing and associated industries. Do you think this practice is
□ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □ *Inevitable* □ *Regrettable* □ *Bad*

Andrew Prentice	Acceptable
Martin Yeomans	Good
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Inevitable
Connie Weaver	Good
Steven Blair	Good
Ricardo Uauy	Inevitable
Lluis Serra Majem	Good
Joanne Slavin	*(comment below)*

All the speakers accept industry sessions or positively think they are good. Joanne Slavin said: 'much of my research in dietary fiber has been funded by food companies, or else some support has been provided by companies who designed low and high fiber products to use in clinical trials'.

2. You have a presentation at a session during the XX International Conference on Nutrition that as published is supported by such industry. Do you think sessions such as this are…
□ *Desirable* □ *Acceptable* □ *Inevitable* □ *Regrettable* □ *Don't know*

Andrew Prentice	Acceptable
Martin Yeomans	Acceptable
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Inevitable
Connie Weaver	Desirable
Steven Blair	Desirable
Ricardo Uauy	Acceptable
Lluis Serra Majem	Desirable
Joanne Slavin	*(comment below)*

All the speakers accept industry sessions, with some reserve from Francisco Perez Jimenez. Joanne Slavin said: 'Without the support of Tate & Lyle I would not have been able to attend the IUNS meeting'.

3. Do you feel that your association with a food or drink product company will or could have any effect on the impact of that company or its products on public health?
□ *Yes, good* □ *Maybe* □ *No* □ *Yes, bad* □ *Don't know*

Andrew Prentice	Yes, good
Martin Yeomans	Yes, good
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Yes, good
Connie Weaver	Yes, good
Steven Blair	Yes, good
Ricardo Uauy	Maybe
Lluis Serra Majem	Maybe
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

The strong majority view is that industry will benefit from association with nutrition and other health professionals. Ricardo Uauy and Lluis Serra Majem are not so sure.

4. The number of sessions mounted with specified and declared industry support at the Granada conference is higher than at any previous ICN. If this is a trend, is this…
□ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □ *Inevitable* □ *Regrettable* □ *Wrong*

Andrew Prentice	Regrettable
Martin Yeomans	Good
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Acceptable
Connie Weaver	.Acceptable
Steven Blair	Good
Ricardo Uauy	Inevitable
Lluis Serra Majem	Good
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

Apart from Andrew Prentice all speakers who responded accept or welcome greater involvement of industry than was apparent at Granada.

5. Do you think the industry sponsor of the session at which you are speaking will publicise the fact that you are a speaker?
□ *Yes* □ *Probably* □ *Possibly* □ *No* □ *Don't know*

Andrew Prentice	Yes
Martin Yeomans	Probably
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Don't know
Connie Weaver	Yes
Steven Blair	Don't know
Ricardo Uauy	Possibly
Lluis Serra Majem	Don't know
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

Apart from Andrew Prentice and Connie Weaver, responses were rather vague. This is surprising, given the importance Big Food places on its links with the scientific community. For instance, Nestlé is currently advertising its partnerships with scientists with a home page lead photo-montage of Ricardo Uauy addressing a meeting, and of Emorn Wisanwisut (an industry session speaker at Granada) and Noel Solomons (who welcomes partnerships with industry).

6. What is your general view on the overall impact of the industry sponsor of your session, on public health and nutrition?

□ *Good* □ *Mostly good* □ *Varied* □ *Mostly bad* □ *Bad* □ *Negligible*

Andrew Prentice	Mostly good
Martin Yeomans	Mostly good
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Mostly good
Connie Weaver	Good
Steven Blair	Good
Ricardo Uauy	Negligible
Lluis Serra Majem	Good
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

Apart from Ricardo Uauy, whose view might disappoint Puleva, Choices International, Deoleo, and Sight & Life-DSM, all the speakers who replied believe that their sessions' sponsors have a good or mostly good impact. Thus Steven Blair and Connie Weaver say they believe that Coca-Cola and Tate & Lyle have a good impact on public health and nutrition. The more cautious responses of Andrew Prentice, Martin Yeomans and Francisco Perez may reflect the fact that dairy products, approved additives and olive oil do not have a similar profile or reputation as, say, sugared soft drinks or snack products.

7. What effect do you feel that the presence of industry, particularly transnational food and drink manufacturers, has on the reputation and quality of nutrition conferences?

□ *Very good* □ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □ *Bad* □ *Unacceptable* □ *Negligible*

Andrew Prentice	Acceptable
Martin Yeomans	Acceptable
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Good
Connie Weaver	Very good
Steven Blair	Very good
Ricardo Uauy	Bad
Lluis Serra Majem	Good
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

Apart from Ricardo Uauy, all speakers who replied accept or approve industry's presence and initiatives.

8. Would you prefer nutrition conferences to be financed solely from public and other non-conflicted sources and from registration fees?
□ *Yes* □ *Preferably* □ *Possibly* □ *Impractical* □ *No*

Andrew Prentice	No
Martin Yeomans	No
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Preferably
Connie Weaver	No
Steven Blair	No
Ricardo Uauy	Preferably
Lluis Serra Majem	No
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

It is interesting that nobody responded with 'impractical'. This suggests that it is fairly well known that nutrition congresses do not need money from conflicted industry and that their financial support goes to make the events more ritzy and more profitable. Ricardo Uauy and Francisco Jimenez favour congresses funded by non-conflicted sources. All the others who replied are in favour of the way things are – and evidently of how they will develop. Martin Yeomans wrote: 'Although I can understand concerns about industry funding, my experience is that large society-driven conferences are just as prone to bias based on the political leanings of the organisers or governments funding them. Purely publically-funded meetings could end up overly politicised and not meet the objectives of changing international nutrition in an effective way, which can only be achieved by partnership with those producing and providing foods and drinks. Many multinational companies are better placed to achieve this, if directed appropriately by unbiased evidence-based science'.

9. Are the social, cultural, economic, social and other broad impacts of transnational and other large food and drink corporations and companies relevant to your association with them?
□ *Yes, very* □ *Yes* □ *Not much* □ *No* □ *Don't know*

Andrew Prentice	Yes, very
Martin Yeomans	Not much
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Not much
Connie Weaver	Yes
Steven Blair	Yes, very
Ricardo Uauy	Yes
Lluis Serra Majem	Don't know
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

10. Have you been rewarded by the company supporting your session at Granada?. Please tick as many boxes as apply
□ *Fee* □ *Honorarium* □ *Travel-hotel* □ *Other financial* □ *Non-financial*

Andrew Prentice	Honorarium
Martin Yeomans	Travel-hotel
Francisco Perez Jimenez	Travel-hotel
Connie Weaver	Travel-hotel
Steven Blair	Travel-hotel
Ricardo Uauy	Non-financial
Lluis Serra Majem	No
Joanne Slavin	(no reply)

Further comments

Speakers were asked to make comments on any related issue, as they wished. Lluis Serra Majem, Joanne Slavin and Andrew Prentice recognise that there may be problems emerging from the interaction with the food and drink industry and that these should be carefully managed. Lluis Serra Majem says: 'I do sometimes think that the line of what is appropriate or politically correct is crossed, but there are mechanisms to monitor that'. Joanne Slavin says that one of the solutions is being transparent. 'At the University of Minnesota we have a rigorous system to protect academic freedom and allow the publication of all results from our research. All research funding that we receive is public information'.

Lluis Serra Majem elaborated. For him 'the 'experience of working in scientific institutions with industry is positive'. He says: 'I have been president of the Mediterranean Diet Foundation for almost 20 years. The Foundation was conceived as a public-private initiative with partners representing the olive oil, wine, nuts, yoghurt and fruit industries. I have never experienced any attempted interference in the work of its Foundation or in the organisation of its congresses and activities. Quite the contrary, it has been a stimulus. It is a reason why we have achieved so much in the recognition of the Mediterranean Diet'.

There is also a serious practical point. He points out that senior academic staff in his university 'have always been encouraged to improve public-private collaboration, with this being required in many cases to obtain a certificate of quality or publicly co-funded PhD programmes or research projects. For me collaboration with industry is an issue that does not bother me personally, and it does not indicate I have any conflicts of interest. If people are to conclude, based please on solid evidence and not just attitude, that science and industry cannot coexist in nutrition congresses, they should analyse well the pros and cons before taking any decision'.

The context of Granada: 2



BIG FOOD WATCH

Digest 2

US Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



Sylvia Escott-Stump, the president of the US Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in 2012, officially portrayed (left); with Michelle Obama (centre); and modelling for Coca-Cola (right)

The second example of Big Food penetration of the US nutrition and dietetics profession is the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the largest such organisation in the world. It has almost 75,000 members, three-quarters of all US registered dietitians. With its Foundation, it had assets in 2012 of $US 37 million (18). Founded a century ago as the American Dietetic Association, its mission includes 'the translation of science into healthy lifestyles'. Its emphasis is on advice to individuals, as an adjunct of the medical profession.

"The nutrition experts'

The change of name in 2012 'communicates that we are the nutrition experts', stated then ADA-AND president Sylvia Escott-Stump (seen above). Its 'partners' and sponsors include Abbott Nutrition (products for children including formula), Coca-Cola, Kellogg, Mars, PepsiCo, and Unilever. Its monthly journal published by Elsevier earns profits from Big Food advertising. Its advice includes 'there are no good and bad foods, only good and bad diets'. Corporate sponsorship and contributions in 2011 amounted to $US 3 million. Partner status gives the right to co-create and co-brand an Academy-themed 'information consumer campaign', like the Coca-Cola 'Heart Truth Campaign' involving fashion shows of women wearing dresses coloured the Coke red, as modelled above by Sylvia Escott-Stump.

In her 2002 book *The Politics of Food* (19), Marion Nestle points out that a large proportion of dietitians are employed by conflicted industry, and states of AND – then ADA – 'the organization apparently is willing to enter into partnerships with any food company or trade organisation, irrespective of the nutritional quality of its products'. As an example she cites a joint campaign with McDonald's built around 'Happy Meals'. She lists ADA 'fact-sheets' on agricultural biotechnology sponsored by Monsanto, on chocolate sponsored by Mars, on fats and oils sponsored by the national association of margarine manufacturers, on snacking by Nabisco, and on sodium by Campbell Soups, among others.

The relationship between ADA-AND and Big Food has become closer in the last decade. In January 2013 *Eat Drink Politics,* run by public interest lawyer Michele Simon, published a report critical of AND's closeness with Big Food (20). The report, *And Now a Word from our Sponsors,* states that in 2011 AND (then ADA) had 38 industry sponsors. Its approved education providers include Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Co, Kraft Foods and Nestlé. Almost a quarter of the speakers at the 2012 AND conference, attended by up to 10,000 dietitians and other health professionals, had industry ties. AND does not support limits on soft drink sizes, nor soft drink ('soda') taxes.

Big Food front groups

The report also points to the involvement in AND of the 'industry group' the International Life Sciences Institute, whose members, funders and governing body are almost all transnational food and drink product manufacturers. The second example is the International Food Information Council (IFIC), which the report describes as 'an industry front group… an entity set up and controlled by other groups, without its actions being attributed to the funders…When companies don't want to take responsibility for certain activities, they fund a front group instead'. Further: 'IFIC presents itself as a legitimate research authority…but…on its board of trustees sit representatives from Coca-Cola, General Mills, Kraft Foods, and Mars, while its funders include PepsiCo, Hershey's, McDonald's, Nestlé, and Monsanto…One of IFIC's sessions at the 2011 annual meeting was: "How Risky is Our Food? Clarifying the Controversies of Chemical Risks". The Academy did not see fit to mention IFIC's role in the session – despite the moderator, Marianne Smith Edge, being the group's senior vice president of nutrition and food safety. At no time did she disclose IFIC's corporate funding, although AND's rules require speakers to disclose any conflicts of interest' (20).

Big Food's 'vice grip'

The action group Dietitians for Professional Integrity has been set up by AND members and others opposed to its partnerships with Big Food corporations (21). As reported in the trade journal *Food Navigator*, while AND 'says members are more than capable of distinguishing facts from spin when listening to an education session from a corporate sponsor at its annual conference, many registered dietitians worry that cozying up to brands that sell soda and chips sends out all the wrong signals'. A petition to stop links with corporations whose interests conflict with those of public health had by October 2013 gained 25,000 signatures. Co-founder of the action group, AND member Andy Bellatti, stated in May: 'In the past five years, I have become more aware of just how much of a vice grip the food industry has on the organization that represents me and tens of thousands of other RDs. It's nothing short of terrifying. I was initially confused. Then disappointed. And, finally, I got angry.

'Why was the Academy essentially selling the credential we have all worked so hard for to the highest bidder? Why should I sit back and allow Coca-Cola to "promote the RD"? Why should I be expected to nod along as the Dairy Council touts the virtues of chocolate milk and PepsiCo boasts about the dusting of whole grains in their SunChips? I studied nutrition to learn about health, and to help people achieve better living through food… There are valid, science-based reasons why partially hydrogenated oils, artificial dyes, sub-therapeutic hormones in animal feed, pesticides, and the massive amounts of sugar consumed by the average American raise concern. And, yet, where is the Academy in all of this? Why is the leading national nutrition organization's response to a troubling health epidemic to "sit at the table" with the very companies that largely created this mess?' (21).

ICN independent sessions and speakers



'Countering Big Food's undermining of healthy food policies' was the theme of a meeting in Bellagio, Como, Italy, led by Carlos Monteiro, Barry Popkin and Boyd Swinburn (top row, first three at left)

Public health nutritionists are trained and charged to think about the wider implications of their work, as public health workers always have been. They are concerned with basic and underlying causes of well-being, health and disease, and with social, cultural, economic, political and environmental dimensions of nutrition, as well as biological and behavioural dimensions. So it is more likely that nutritionists engaged with public health will be aware of the nature and impact of transnational Big Food corporations, than colleagues whose thinking is laboratory-based.

Thus, a meeting at the Rockefeller Center at the Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Como, Italy was held in June 2013. Its leaders were Carlos Monteiro of the University of São Paulo, Brazil, Barry Popkin of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (the convenor) and Boyd Swinburn of the University of Auckland, New Zealand and of Deakin University, Australia (the people on the left in the top row in the picture above). The product of the meeting was a *Bellagio Declaration* on 'Countering Big Food's Undermining of Healthy Food Policies' (22). It states: 'The actions of Big Food have been the most significant force in blocking public health efforts to promote healthy food policies and reduce obesity in many parts of the world'.

The 8 speakers we polled at the Granada congress whose sessions were funded and organised independently in the conventional way, probably would all identify themselves as public health nutritionists. We asked them what they thought about the trend towards much greater engagement with Big Food at nutrition congresses. Their responses to our poll are below. Again, these should be taken only as an indication of what speakers not aligned with industry felt.



Eight speakers whose sessions were independent from industry: Stuart Gillespie, Wilma Freire, Chessa Lutter, Andrew Collins, Claus Leitzman, Carlos Monteiro, Harriet Kuhnlein, Tim Lang

Stuart Gillespie, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington DC, whose mission is 'to provide research-based policy solutions that sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition', spoke on 'Securing and sustaining the political momentum for addressing malnutrition'.

Wilma Freire, Ministry of Health officer in Ecuador, formerly of the Pan American Health Organization, spoke at the Forum of SLAN, the organisation of Latin American nutrition societies, representing her country.

Chessa Lutter, food and nutrition advisor at the Pan American Health Organization, spoke on the alignment of complementary feeding guidelines with local food preferences and affordability of food in Latin America.

Andrew Collins of the department of nutrition biology at the University of Oslo in Norway, spoke on 'Phytonutrients and DNA damage prevention'.

Claus Leitzmann, former director of the institute of nutrition at the University of Giessen in Germany, and former International Union of Nutritional Sciences treasurer, and author of the July-August *World Nutrition* celebration of *The Limits to Growth*, spoke as one of the IUNS 'living legends'.

Carlos Monteiro of the school of public health at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, and co-author of the December 2012 *World Nutrition* commentary on *The Food System*, spoke from a Southern perspective, on the role of industrial food processing in food systems and their impact on nutrition and health.

Harriet Kuhnlein of McGill University in Canada, chair of the IUNS Task Force on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Nutrition, co-chair of the *Rio2012* world public health nutrition congress, and co-author of the August-September 2013 *World Nutrition* commentary on 'Indigenous People's Food Systems' spoke on 'Traditional food systems of indigenous peoples'.

Tim Lang, of City University, London, UK, co-author of the book *Food Policy,* spoke on sustainable food and diet policies, in a satellite meeting.

Here is the poll and the speakers' answers

1. Nutrition conferences are often organised with support from international and other large food and drink product manufacturing and associated industries. Do you think this practice is
□ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □*Inevitable* □ *Regrettable* □ *Bad*

Stuart Gillespie	Regrettable
Wilma Freire	Regrettable
Chessa Lutter	Regrettable
Andrew Collins	Regrettable
Claus Leitzmann	Bad
Carlos Monteiro	Bad
Harriet Kuhnlein	Inevitable
Tim Lang	Regrettable

The contrast with the industry-supported speakers, all of whose responses were 'Good', 'Acceptable' or 'Inevitable' is apparent. The only overlap was Harriet Kuhnlein's judgement of 'Inevitable'. Stuart Gillespie pointed out that there is a 'need to differentiate companies', because 'some are promoting products and practices that damage health and nutritional status, and some are not'. Tim Lang said that the practice of industry-organised and -funded sessions, as well as being regrettable, 'is also rather sad'.

2. Do you feel that the association of scientists with food or drink product companies will or could have any effect on the impact of that company or its products on public health?
□ *Yes, good* □ *Maybe* □ *No* □*Yes, bad* □ *Don't know*

Stuart Gillespie	(See below)
Wilma Freire	Yes, bad
Chessa Lutter	Yes, bad
Andrew Collins	Maybe
Claus Leitzmann	Yes, bad
Carlos Monteiro	Yes, bad
Harriet Kuhnlein	Maybe
Tim Lang	Yes, bad

Again, there is a sharp contrast with the responses of the speakers at industry-controlled and -funded sessions. Except for Andrew Collins and Harriet Kuhnlein, all speakers who responded were worried and felt that association with scientists would make the impact of Big Food and such-like industries on public health worse. Stuart Gillespie said: 'If perceived by the public as a *de facto* sanctioning by the

scientific community of practices or products that damage health and nutrition, this is clearly dangerous'. Tim Lang made an allusion to a preventable accident, saying that the normalisation of the association between scientists and conflicted industry 'is like watching a car crash in slow motion – a mix of sadness and horror'.

3. The number of sessions mounted with specified and declared industry support at the Granada conference is higher than at any previous ICN. If this is a trend, is this…
□ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □ *Inevitable* □ *Regrettable* □ *Wrong*

Stuart Gillespie	Wrong
Wilma Freire	Regrettable
Chessa Lutter	Wrong
Andrew Collins	*(no reply)*
Claus Leitzmann	Wrong
Carlos Monteiro	Wrong
Harriet Kuhnlein	Inevitable
Tim Lang	Regrettable and wrong

The response of Harriet Kuhnlein should not we think be interpreted as meaning that she welcomes the trend towards ever-greater Big Food presence and influences. Of the seven speakers who responded, four said the practice and the trend is just plain wrong, in contrast with three of the sponsored speakers who said it is good. It means driving in 'the wrong direction', says Tim Lang.

4. What is your general view on the overall impact of the industry sponsor sessions, on public health and nutrition?
□ *Good* □ *Mostly good* □ *Varied* □ *Mostly bad* □ *Bad* □ *Negligible*

Stuart Gillespie	Negligible
Wilma Freire	Bad
Chessa Lutter	(no response)
Andrew Collins	Varied
Claus Leitzmann	Bad
Carlos Monteiro	Bad
Harriet Kuhnlein	Varied
Tim Lang	Bad

Here there are four 'hard line' responses of 'bad' and two of 'varied' which may take into account the variable policies and practices of the industry sponsors, mentioned above by Stuart Gillespie. 'This opens up public health nutrition to the accusation that it has slipped into a client culture', Tim Lang says

5. What effect do you feel that the presence of industry, particularly transnational food and drink manufacturers, has on the reputation and quality of nutrition conferences?
□ *Very good* □ *Good* □ *Acceptable* □ *Negligible* □ *Unacceptable* □ *Bad*

Stuart Gillespie	Bad
Wilma Freire	Bad
Chessa Lutter	Bad
Andrew Collins	Bad
Claus Leitzmann	Unacceptable
Carlos Monteiro	Unacceptable
Harriet Kuhnlein	Acceptable
Tim Lang	Bad

Tim Lang may have summed up the majority view here by saying 'It demeans the notion of independence'. Seven of the eight speakers judged that the effect is and will be bad or unacceptable. Harriet Kuhnlein's response may spring from a feeling that when all is said and done, conferences are not that important. All but one of the industry speakers responded 'very good', 'good' or 'acceptable'. This issue obviously is important for conference organisers. Will closer association with Big Food create a higher reputation for the profession and more participants, as well as more money? Or will a lot of key scientists stay away, in a context of increased intensity of criticism in the profession and also in the media?

6. Would you prefer nutrition conferences to be financed solely from public and other non-conflicted sources and from registration fees?
□ *Yes* □ *Preferably* □ *Possibly* □ *Impractical* □ *No*

Stuart Gillespie	Preferably
Wilma Freire	Yes
Chessa Lutter	Yes
Andrew Collins	Preferably
Claus Leitzmann	Yes
Carlos Monteiro	Yes
Harriet Kuhnlein	Possibly
Tim Lang	Yes

Most speakers here would prefer conferences to be funded only from public and other non-conflicted sources, with 5 of the 8 responses being a direct 'yes', in contrast to 5 of the responses from sponsored speakers being 'no'. As before, it seems that they are aware that this is perfectly possible. Tim Lang mentions the need to promote more virtual gatherings to avoid expensive CO_2 emitting travel.

7. Have you been rewarded as a speaker of the congress? Source of funds?
□ *Fee* □ *Honorarium* □ *Travel-hotel* □*Other financial* □ *Non-financial*

Stuart Gillespie	Non-financial	
Wilma Freire	Travel-hotel	
Chessa Lutter	Fee+travel-hotel	Helen Keller
Andrew Collins	Travel-hotel	Congress
Claus Leitzmann	Fee+travel-hotel	Congress
Carlos Monteiro	Fee	Congress
Harriet Kuhnlein	Travel-hotel	IUNS
Tim Lang	Travel-hotel	

Chessa Lutter, Claus Leitzmann and Harriet Kuhnlein think that the issue of funding for travel and accommodation is not relevant. For Tim Lang also, this 'muddies the waters. One can never know the extent to which funding distorts findings'. Harriet Kuhnlein says 'Some scientists are immune to this pressure'.

Further comments

Harriet Kuhnlein also says 'there is good information and good intention for good partnerships without conflict of interest'. She recommends that 'there should be no conflict of interest or coercion of speakers by the sponsor. There should be a signed agreement of benefits shared with speakers, and this should be declared at the presentation and even in the programme, as in journals' She 'found the Granada ICN superb and very enjoyable'. She believes that industry support was essential to provide speakers' dinners and other social activities. 'I am sure the social activities for speakers, in general, could not have been mounted without the support of industry funds, and especially in this economic climate in Spain'. If the rumour that the surplus of the Granada ICN amounts to somewhere around $US 750,000 is more or less accurate, her assumption might not be correct.

Carlos Monteiro refused the invitation to the speakers' dinner and gathered with other colleagues and friends in a restaurant in Granada where they could avoid accepting largesse from corporations whose practices and products, as he believes, are undermining healthy diets and food systems worldwide.

Stuart Gillespie was outraged by the penetration of Big Food in congresses held in association with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences. 'The IUNS needs to explain why it continues to accept sponsorship from companies whose practices and products have consistently been shown to damage human health and nutrition. Why spend so much time and effort organising yet more scientific sessions on the drivers of the obesity epidemic when some of the main causes are sitting in the audience?'

Conclusion

Editor's note

As is stated in all contributions to *World Nutrition,* this commentary, and all *Big Food Watch* contributions in *WN*, should not be taken to be the position of the World Public Health Nutrition Association. They are also not publications of the Conflict of Interests Coalition (23). Part of the purpose of the Association is 'To disseminate, encourage and promote information, discussion, and debate'. This is a main purpose of *WN*. Our contributors speak for themselves. Three more points. One is that this commentary is a beginning. It shines light on a murky relationship between the nutrition profession and conflicted industry. Two is that this commentary and other *BFW* contributions are mainly informative and written as neutrally as the facts allow, but they will include material that some readers will not agree with, and perhaps mistakes or misjudgements that require correction. We are asking for responses of all types for publication: see below. Three is that after many discussions over a period of years, we are satisfied that the issues raised are important and urgent and need addressing by the profession, as indicated by Richard Horton of *The Lancet* (1).

This is one of a series of *Big Food Watch* contributions. *BFW* is a network from international and national public interest organisations. Our intention is to go transnational, in a small way, with the purpose of serving the public interest. It is too soon to agree any conclusion that suggests settled judgements. On the matter of the relationship between the nutrition profession and nutritionists, and conferences designed to discuss and advance nutrition science, we have some modest suggestions, which we will refine after more consultation. Existing guidelines *such as those proposed for medical conferences* (24) should be consulted.

- Disclosure. Organisers of conferences should publish a statement concerning the content of their conferences, and their position on entities with interests that do or may conflict or compete with nutrition policy and practice.
- Committees. All members of the scientific and organising committees of conferences should have no such interests. In case of any doubt, they should be asked to be absent from discussions at which relevant decisions are taken.
- Finance. The income and expenditure budgets for conferences should be published on the conference website in good time to be discussed and if necessary changed by members of relevant organisations and participants.
- Funding. No funding or any other support is acceptable from entities identified here as Big Food, other than exhibition stands located in a separate hall, of which the revenue goes to independent public health programmes.
- Big Food. People from entities identified here as Big Food may participate in conferences only in sessions that are controlled and funded independently and only when their position is clearly identified.

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Status

Fabio Gomes writes: The *Big Food Watch* network includes leaders of public interest organisations and social movements, advised by UN and government officials, legislators, scientists, and other professionals. Initial members of the network will be announced in the January 2014 issue of *WN*. My thanks to them all. Thanks also to the *Food System* team at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, for intellectual input. The *TFS* team includes Carlos Monteiro, Geoffrey Cannon, Jean-Claude Moubarac, Renata Bertazzi Levy, and Rafael Claro. Special thanks to Geoffrey Cannon as *WN* editor, who with others encouraged the creation of *Big Food Watch* in discussions during congresses held between 2009 and 2012 in São Paulo, Porto, Como, Seoul, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro and Havana, and who has supported me as this commentary was prepared. Also special thanks to the ICN Granada speakers who responded, especially those who made substantial comments. Declaration: I believe that the protection and support of public health in all its aspects needs to come from public sources. If this is a competing interest I declare it.

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