

December blog

Fabio Gomes

It is midsummer here in the South. Here I close my columnist's year of 2010 by celebrating the joy nature provides to us all year round, in the form of a mosaic of the fruits I have shown you since March. Then I have some news on the promotion of fruits and vegetables from Guadalajara, Mexico. I have promising news from the social mobilisation and struggle in Brazil to get the marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks properly regulated. Plus, some more on the environmental impact of ultra-processed food and drink products. Finally, the butts of my (bad) Joke of the Month are consumers of bottled water.

Agrobiodiversity

Mosaic of sensual delights



Here above is my delicious fruit salad for you. This is just a sample of all the joy mother nature provided us all this year long. Here we have the delicacy of blackberries, the softness of bananas, the beauty of pineapples, the design of star fruits, the juicy pulp of *graviola*, and the bittersweet flavour of our unique fruit from the north of Brazil – *cupuaçu*.

I call on you all my dear readers, citizens of this planet, to thank you, and to ask you to fight every day to protect this treasure, that gathers us around the same table, the table of ideas and principles that flows towards the protection and perpetuation of the public goods that nourish the living and physical world we share. Let our great Brazilian poet *Olavo Bilac* inspire us.

The sun (*O sol*)

Hail, glorious sun!
(*Salve, sol glorioso!*)
Nature responds to your fruitful glow,
(*Ao teu clarão fecundo,*)
Singing, and the world is in ecstasy.
(*A natureza canta e se extasia o mundo.*)
What sorrow, what pity, when you set!
(*Que tristeza, que dó, quando desapareces!*)
But then you rise, and barren land flourishes;
(*Vens, e a terra estragada e feia reverdeces;*)

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**THIS MONTH IN
WORLD NUTRITION**



With your heat, hedges become perfumed;
(Abres com o teu calor as sebes perfumadas;)
 You give their flowers to the dewy bushes;
(Dás flores ao verdor das moitas orvalbas;)
 Heating nests, and the fledglings' throats
(Os ninhos aquecendo, as gargantas das aves)
 Warble of love, with gentle harmonies.
(Dás gorjeios de amor, e harmonias suaves;)
 And, flickering over the opening vegetables,
(E, cintilando sobre os tufos de verdura,)
 You give the ripe fruit on every branch.
(Em cada ramo põe uma fruta madura.)

Promotion of vegetables and fruits
Enrique sees the elephant



We all know the story about the 'elephant in the room', nicely illustrated by the picture above: the massive issue that everybody ignores as they go about their business as if nothing remarkable is going on. Here is an example.

Last month I participated in the Sixth International Congress on Promotion of Fruits and Vegetables Consumption, held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. Jalisco is the state where *mariaichis* originally came from, and also is the land of the *blue agaves* from which tequila is produced. Guadalajara is famous for its cuisine, which has as one of its secrets, fresh herbs and spices. As my Mexican hosts explained to me, the chilli sauce that's an essential ingredient in Mexican food is best prepared by prompt maceration of the fresh ingredients you can see below.



Carlos Monteiro

The riddle of the Great Food Pyramid

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WVN

Ultra-processing

Carlos Monteiro

Why bread is ultra-processed: Should you eat it?

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SCN CRISIS

OUR SOLUTION

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THIS MONTH'S COLUMNS

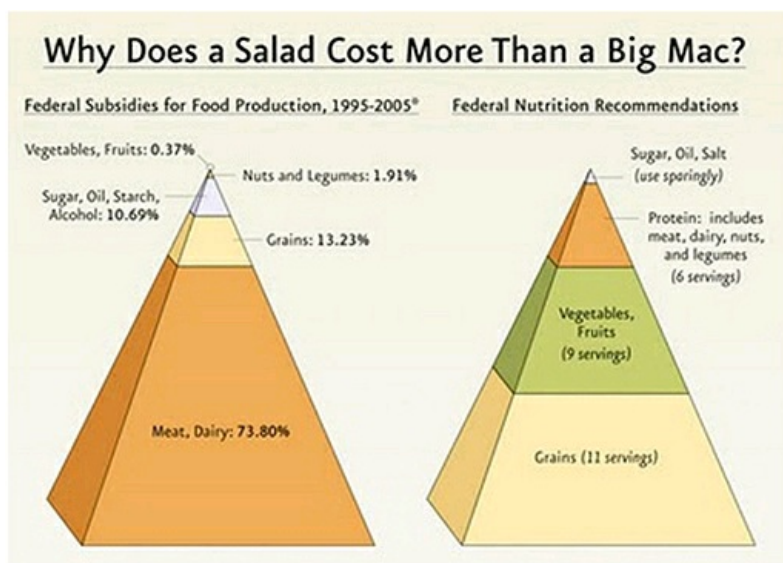
Fabio Gomes

From Latin America:
 Enjoy! My message for 2011

Back to the elephant. At the congress, Enrique Jacoby of the Pan American Health Organization gave a keynote plenary lecture. Unusually, the title of his presentation as he gave it, was different from that printed in the programme, which was: *'La promoción del consumo de frutas y verduras en el marco de la Estrategia global de alimentación, actividad física y salud en América Latina'* (The promotion of fruit and vegetables consumption as part of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health in Latin America) (1). Instead, he changed his talk, and went straight to the point. His changed title was: *'Regulación de publicidad de comida chatarra a niños: oportunidad para frutas y verduras'* (Regulation of the marketing of junk food to children: Opportunity for fruits and vegetables), as you can see in the picture below, taken as he socked it to the audience.



The whole congress was designed to discuss how to promote fruits and vegetables in all aspects of food systems. But apart from Enrique's presentation, no mention was made of the other food and products that unfairly compete with fruits and vegetables. Here below is one example. The 'Food Pyramid' on the right shows what the US government recommends that practically everybody should consume more of, including fruit and vegetables. The Pyramid on the left, to be found on www.seriousseats.com, shows where US federal subsidies go. Almost three-quarters of all go to meat and dairy products, amounting in 2007 to around \$US 35 billion, and 0.37 per cent go to fruit and vegetables. That is to say, comparatively and absolutely, burgers are artificially cheap, whereas salads are artificially expensive.



Enrique's presentation was on another enormous 'elephant in the room': the vast expenditure on advertising and marketing of junk food, including to children. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends daily consumption of at least 400 grams (close to 1 lb) of fruits and vegetables (2). At the same time, the transnationals are spending many billions of dollars a year pushing unlimited amounts of energy-

Here is the bad - and good - news

[Click here](#)

Geoffrey Cannon



Our roving columnist
Leo Tolstoy on multicausality
Are computers taking us over?

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Claudio Schuftan



From Asia
What Eduardo Galeano tells us
Nutritionists of the world, unite!

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Reggie Annan



From Africa
I continue to speak for Africa
Building competence and capacity

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NEXT MONTH IN W/ OUT ON 1 FEBRUARY

W/



Ultra-processing



"I was on the low-carbohydrate diet for a week and lost three inches off my smile."

Carlos Monteiro

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dense fatty, sugary or salty 'fast' products. And how many people in the world, and how many children, read WHO expert reports, compared with the number who are exposed to the 'viral' promotion of ultra-processed products, on television, on the internet, in shops, and in schools and playgrounds? Thank you Enrique, for enabling everybody at the Guadalajara congress to see this elephant!

References

1. <http://www.congreso5xdia.com.mx/es/contenido/programa/programa.php>
2. World Health Organization/ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Expert Report on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*. Geneva: WHO/FAO; 2003. WHO Technical Report Series 916.

Regulating the advertising of unhealthy products Counter-snack attack

Last month I said a bit about food marketing regulation in Brazil, and brought some bad news (1). A judge has over-ruled the decision of the federal regulatory organisation ANVISA, and has said that food marketing regulation is unconstitutional, because it is not explicitly mentioned in the Brazilian 1988 constitution. This would be rather like saying that legislators should not engage with climate change because nobody thought to list it as an issue 20 years ago. So, what is being done to challenge this silly ruling? Is that it? Dead end?

I'm glad to say no, it is not! Right after the decision of Judge Seixas, civil society organisations, research institutes, universities and several other actors, including from law and the media, got rapidly organised and have asked the judge to reconsider her decision. For more details, see the home page story this month, *'The unstoppable'*.

The formal government response to the judge from ANVISA has been sent. At the same time, Brazilian society, and the international community, is standing by the need for rational and fair food marketing regulation. The group is mobilised by the Frente pela Regulamentação da Publicidade de Alimentos (Front for the Regulation of Food Marketing). Its purpose is to uphold ANVISA and the regulations which, until the judicial ruling, were set to take effect as from this month – 26 December 2010.

Public health nutritionists, lawyers, economists, and communicators who are members of the Frente are now discussing how best to show that regulating food marketing in Brazil is already within ANVISA's competence, and that this is a case where the needs of public health prevail over commercial needs. Much this month will depend on the tide and mood of public opinion.

Reference

1. Gomes F. Six hours of words from our sponsor, and other items. [Column] Website of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, November 2010. Obtainable at www.wphna.org

Ultra-processed products. Environmental impact What our trash cans eat

'Carbs': The answer

W/N



Michael Latham
Urban Jonsson
Elisabeth Sterken
George Kent

GET YOUR TEETH INTO
RUTF STUFF

(At last!)



Last month I referred to the bad effects ultra-processed products have on human health (1). So has Carlos Monteiro, in his *epic commentary on ultra-processing*, that in November has been accessed by over 15,000 readers from all over the world. But that's only the beginning of the story. So far we have not said much about the environmental impact of ultra-processing. This is a whole vast topic in itself. Those of us who work in the field of public health nutrition, and have a broad perspective, need to team up with actors from other fields, such as environmental protection. The devastation that ultra-processed products are gradually causing on our planet are a good example of why this is essential.

We are always being told to recycle bottles, cans and other types of package. In practice what does this mean, that we should eat the bottle and use old cans as vases for flowers? According to the US *National Resources Defense Council* only 13 percent of bottles get recycled (2). In Brazil the Ministry of Environment estimates that one-third of domestic garbage is packages and bottles (3). For the results, see the picture above. So the recycling message is not working. It's time instead that governments proclaimed: 'Consume fewer packaged foods and bottled drinks'. Let's campaign for manufacturers to put labels on their products saying in big letters: WARNING. BOTTLES AND CANS ARE POLLUTING THE PLANET.

References

1. Gomes F. The fables we buy, and other items. [Column] Website of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, November 2010. Obtainable at www.wphna.org
2. <http://www.nrdc.org/water/drinking/qbw.asp>
3. <http://www.mma.gov.br/sitio>

Joke of the month. Privatisation of public goods
Bottled water. Ching, ching!



Now I follow up my October column (1) and bring you this month's Joke of the Month, which is a joke on you, if you are a bottled water consumer. In October I

pointed out that some giant manufacturers are putting the heat on sugary soft drinks, with the help of public health nutritionists, as a way to market their bottled waters. In doing so, tap water is forgotten. This ploy is effective.

Here are some calculations showing how this is impacting on consumer expenditure. Take the price of tap water in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where I live, compared with the price of the cheapest bottled water. The cost of a 20 litre bottle of water is enough to buy 1000 litres of tap water. Yes, the cheapest bottled water is 50 times the cost of tap water. If instead the comparison is with a 1 litre bottle the price difference is a factor of 200. No wonder the transnational bottled water manufacturers have established institutes of hydration. No wonder long-established mineral and spring water companies have been taken over by transnationals. No wonder publicly owned water companies are being privatised. No wonder we hear so much about the bugs that lurk in tap water. Like breastmilk, tap water is bad for business.

Bottled water consumers are being taken for a ride. One way to demonstrate this would be to have a hydration red nose day – see above. The red noses could be made from recycled plastic bottles.

Reference

1. Gomes F. Six hours of words from our sponsor, and other items. [Column] Website of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, October 2010. Obtainable at www.wphna.org

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This column is reviewed by Geoffrey Cannon. My many thanks to Enrique Jacoby for his great speech on food marketing regulation. The ultra-processed food item was also inspired by a meeting held in São Paulo hosted by Carlos Monteiro, to whom renewed thanks. I also thank Juan Rivera for the precious time we had together for discussions in Mexico. Thanks too to the folks from Serious Eats. Once again, as a 'food activist' I owe many thanks to the Brazilians now dedicated to the approval and implementation of the Brazilian national food marketing regulation, and also to the international community for their support.

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December blog: Fabio Gomes

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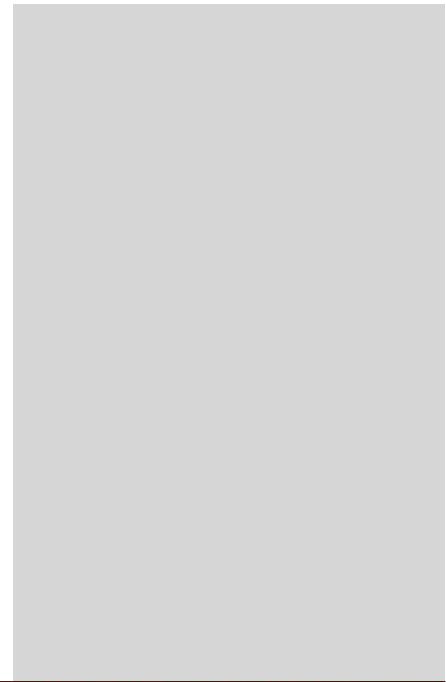
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