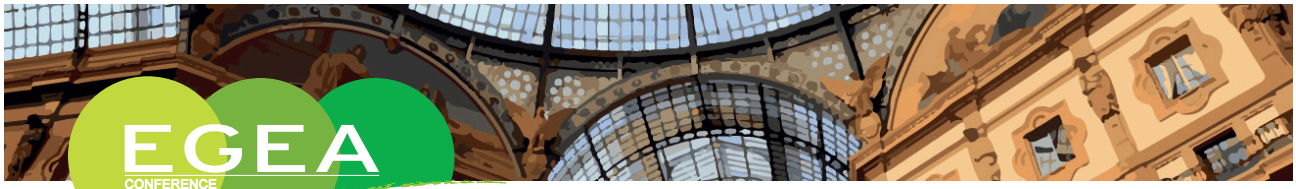

EGEA 2015 STATEMENT

HEALTHY DIET, HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT WITHIN A FRUITFUL ECONOMY: THE ROLE OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

EGEA Conference - 7th Edition
June 3rd - 5th 2015
Fiera Milano - Milan - Italy

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Global nutrition and agricultural communities need to find innovative ways to create and support healthy eating environments and promote policies to increase fruit and vegetables (F&V) production and consumption. The aims are to improve public health, profitability of F&V growers and sustainability of the production systems. One way, among others, of achieving this is through taking biodiversity and nutrient-density of crops into account.

The problems of ill health throughout the world are now dominated by four major non communicable diseases (NCDs) - cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, cancer and diabetes – with escalating overweight/obesity rates, particularly in children, amplifying these immense societal burdens.

The co-existence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, NCDs and overweight/ obesity reinforces a renewed need to consider health and nutrition as a primary societal goal which requires a transformation in our food systems.

The financial costs of these eating patterns and nutrition related epidemics are already threatening health care and services (even in highly developed countries) and are now significantly impeding national economies.

As the leading cause of death globally, NCDs were responsible for 38 million (68%) of the world's 56 million deaths in 2012. More than 40% of them (16 million) were premature deaths under age 70 years with the burden of disability from NCDs being far greater.

The number of people with NCDs have increased due to the global rise in overweight and obesity which now costs the world $2 trillion /year. Furthermore, over 1 billion adults are expected to be obese by 2030 if no major effort is made to reverse the current trend.

There is evidence that F&V consumption decreases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes, as well as certain types of cancer. Diet and physical inactivity accounts for over 10% of all global disabilities with F&V being dominant factors. This means that billions could be saved each year with disabilities markedly reduced if F&V intakes reached the recommended amount (at least 400g/d).

In their efforts to reduce the prevalence of NCDs, most developed as well as developing countries and governments acknowledge the World Health Organization's declaration for increased F&V consumption. Yet national F&V dietary recommendations are often at odds with the same country's agricultural or food policies. A few examples illustrate this situation:

- Many high-income countries continue to provide producer subsidies for other products, such as grain crops and meat/dairy products, with little support for F&V production, leading to a global deficit in F&V supply and consumption.
- In the United States, F&V should make up 50% of consumers' plates/portions based on "MyPlate" dietary recommendations; yet the Department of Agriculture devotes less than 1% of its farm subsidies to support research, production and marketing for those foods and the whole of the US landscape is distorted by massive excess cereal production for animal feeding and subsidized export. In the U.S., the commodity crops receiving the largest amount of agricultural subsidies are grains, livestock, and dairy and under current agricultural policy, farmers are penalized for growing "specialty crops" (F&V) if they have received federal farm payments to grow other crops.
- In Europe, a fall of the consumption of fresh F&V has been observed over the last decade (nearly one piece of F&V per day/ person). Yet, in the EU, close to €40 billion is spent on the farming sector with less than 3 % going to F&V sector while it delivers close to 18 % of total agricultural production value in the EU.

In the US and Europe, studies have shown that access and availability to fruit and vegetables are not evenly distributed among populations compared to less healthy products. Issues of access and availability can be tackled through proactive planning.

Besides the health aspects, the global agenda is now also dominated by climate change and the need for planetary sustainability, with locally produced F&V being much better than animal foods, for minimizing climate change and promoting sustainability. This reinforces the need for a coherent strategic shift in the food supply chain, manufacturing, retailing and in consumer demand. This is now accepted by Heads of State at the 2011 UN General Assembly. However, practically no coherent initiatives have been yet properly implemented.

Policy responses that focus on increasing F&V consumption can achieve significant gains. In high-income countries, most existing

policies focus on school feeding initiatives and broader health promotion.

Comprehensive school food policies that set strict nutrition standards can increase children's consumption of F&V. Evidence shows that making F&V available in schools (e.g. through food or nutrient-based standards and school fruit schemes) has a positive impact on daily F&V intake.

Such programmes work by overcoming barriers in terms of access to F&V and by encouraging children to learn healthy taste preferences and dietary behaviours that have been shown to extend beyond the school gate.

By contributing to increased daily F&V intake, food standards and school F&V programmes also help children eat well-balanced and diversified diets while meeting dietary and energy recommendations and achieving a balanced caloric intake. Nevertheless, such efforts may be overwhelmed by the hundred fold greater marketing of unhealthy foods (High in Fat, Salt and Sugar- HFSS).

Modest regulatory and fiscal measures have been introduced but these are negligible compared with the huge, decades long, supply led subsidies by the EU and US which have induced the current distorted food system. Changes are needed to both the food system and food environment to influence the choices people make.

To enhance F&V consumption efficiently, there is an urgent need for
coherent policies that promote healthy eating in the areas outlined below:

A. Information and education

1. Authorize the use of consensual scientific research recommendations for claims on the benefits of fresh F&V consumption. Adopt nutrient profiles and health claims legislation in the EU based on WHO guidance.
2. Reinforce the role and responsibilities of public authorities in informing consumers on the positive assets of fresh produce and the benefit of a healthy diet rich in F&V.
3. Incorporate nutrition into the curricula in national education systems : it is important to develop food chain curricula linking production and consumption systems so that what is produced and consumed is also ecologically sustainable.
4. Develop nutritional guidelines for health professionals so that coherent nutrition advice and support is provided to the public and the media.

B. Food environment

Marketing and advertising

1. Support the F&V sector's promotion and marketing efforts.
2. Involve the advertising and food industries, the media (TV, internet, radio, print, cinema, etc) and the retailers in taking into account F&V public health messages.
3. Regulate food marketing to children to reduce both the power of, and children's exposure to, marketing of unhealthy foods.

Healthy foods in public institutions

1. Establish F&V programmes in schools and extend provision from primary to secondary schools to create a seamless approach.
2. Set nutrition standards for foods provided in schools, universities, public worksite and health care institutions (e.g. in meals, vending machines).
3. Use public procurement as a tool to enhance F&V consumption by adapting guidelines and rules for public bodies (schools, hospitals and other health facilities, prisons, canteens) to use more fresh F&V in their menus.

Healthier retail environment

1. Reinforce the responsibilities of public sector in developing policies and infrastructure to increase access and availability to F&V in supermarkets and retail outlets, especially in underserved areas.
2. Planning authorities ensuring that access and availability to fruit and vegetables are part of municipal governance eg provision of markets for local produce.

Fiscal interventions and incentives

1. Set incentives for retailers and other outlets to increase the availability of healthier foods, especially fresh F&V.
2. Use economic and fiscal tools to create incentives for healthier food choices; this should combine a mix of tax-subsidy schemes. A tax on sugar, sweets and sweetened beverages should be studied alongside subsidy schemes for F&V for the potential to induce, among others, higher consumption of healthier alternatives such as F&V and to gauge any possible adverse effects of direct taxes.
3. F&V subsidies or vouchers to increase economic access for low-income consumers using tax-significant proceedings.

Food system

1. Ensure there is an adequate supply of F&V available to retailers.
2. Support and encourage the F&V supply chain to ensure that F&V reach consumers in minimally processed forms.
3. Support F&V production through similar policy instruments used for grain, meat and dairy production while taking account of the perishable nature of F&V and their nutrient composition (biodiversity).
4. Support F&V research to encourage farmers to increase their production of a variety of F&V, especially of micronutrient rich varieties and cultivars in line with countries' agro ecology and production capacities. Increased production rates will also increase jobs, creating a win-win situation for agriculture, employment and health.

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Note to the editors:

The VII EGEA conference took place in Milan from 3-5 June 2015. This statement was adopted by EGEA as conclusion of its conference considering the valuable contributions from EGEA scientists, European Commission (DG Agriculture, DG SANTE, DG JRC), European Parliament, EPHA, FAO, IFAVA, WCRF International, WPHNA and the WHO.