

# Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

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**Paper for Information: Food Standards Agency Policy  
Initiatives in Nutrition**

**Agenda Item 11**

Please see attached paper for information.

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## Food Standards Agency Policy Initiatives in Nutrition

The Food Standards Agency inherited a series of research programmes from MAFF. An overall review process is now in place, taking into account recent detailed reviews of individual programmes. It is intended that a strategic approach be taken to the development of new programmes in the nutrition area. A number of workshops have either taken place or are planned over the next year to allow policy implications of specific areas to be considered. SACN members who are interested in attending any of the workshops should contact the Secretariat at FSA.

### **Existing Nutrition Research Programmes**

**1) N02: The role of dietary lipids in the development of cardiovascular disease:** Full programme review (2000) completed

Workshop programme:

**December 12<sup>th</sup> 2001:** Is there enough evidence to make dietary recommendations on MUFA intakes?

**March 18<sup>th</sup> 2002:** Are vegetable sources of n3 PUFAs as beneficial to health as animal sources?

This programme examines the various hypotheses that have been put forward suggesting that changes in the quality as well as the quantity of dietary fat reduce the prevalence of cardiovascular disease.

**2) N03: Complex Carbohydrates:** Programme finished, review to be carried out by Professor David Southgate, to finish by April 2002

This programme originated from the premise that increasing complex carbohydrate intakes might have public health benefits in relation to the development of conditions such as obesity, cardiovascular disease and bowel diseases including cancer. Now that the programme has wound down, a review of the findings is being carried out to clarify the policy implications.

**3) N04: Antioxidants in Foods:** Review commissioned to start June 2001, finish June 2002

Workshop programme:

**September 2001:** Antioxidants in Foods: How should requirements be defined? (Report available from FSA)

**March 2002: Programme review** workshop organised by British Nutrition Foundation

This programme originated from the observation that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables appears to be associated with benefits to health. This has been hypothesised to be as a result of the fact that these foods are rich sources of nutrients and other chemicals which are known to have antioxidant properties.

Following a review of the programme in 1996 it was concluded that future research in this programme should concentrate on human intervention studies to study the effects of antioxidants present in the diet, using validated biomarkers developed as potential intermediate predictors of disease end points. Studies in this area are on hold and the programme is now under review to ensure that the research commissioned is relevant to FSA policy needs.

**4) N05: Optimal Nutrition:** Full programme review 1999 completed

Workshop programme:

**June 2001:** Review of projects on iron, copper and zinc. Report to be published in BNF bulletin in due course.

**June 27th 2002: Bone Health**

The aim of research under this theme is to conduct appropriate research in areas relating nutrition to public health thereby providing the scientific basis for population and sub-population-level dietary guidelines for optimal health.

The overall theme arises from the concept of optimal nutrition being wider than simply the prevention of overt nutritional deficiencies, to include the maintenance of good health and reduction of risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, bone diseases, and altered or declining mental function.

**5) N10: Dietary Surveys and Nutrients in Food (Surveys)**

The objective of this programme is to provide accurate and up-to-date information on the amounts of food eaten in the UK and its nutritional value. This information is vital to securing a sound evidence base for action to promote a healthy diet.

**Dietary Surveys**

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) provides cross-sectional information on the dietary habits and nutritional status of large samples of people representative of the British population.

The NDNS programme is split into four separate surveys, conducted at about two-yearly intervals. Each survey has examined a nationally representative sample drawn from four different population age groups: children aged 1½-4½ years, young people aged 4-18 years, people aged 65 years or over and adults aged 19-64 years. The fieldwork for the most recent NDNS of adults aged 19-64 years finished in summer 2001 and the report is expected in Spring 2003.

Each survey collects detailed, quantitative information on food consumption and nutrient intake using a weighed dietary record, kept by the participant for four or seven days. Other components are physical measurements (e.g. height, weight and blood pressure), a blood sample for analysis of nutritional status indices, a detailed interview to collect information on socio-economic, demographic and lifestyle characteristics, and, for some groups, a urine sample and an assessment of oral health.

The key benefits of the NDNS are:

- provision of detailed and robust food consumption data for individuals;
- provision of data on diet, nutritional status and related characteristics in the same individuals to allow analysis of the links between them.

Data from the NDNS are used to monitor the food consumption, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the British population to inform development of nutrition policy and healthy eating advice, and for food chemical exposure assessment. The Agency is commissioning a review of its dietary survey programme to determine the most appropriate methods of collecting information to meet its requirements.

### **Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS)**

The Agency is commissioning a dietary survey of low income/materially deprived consumers in the UK in order to obtain robust data on food consumption, nutrient intakes, nutritional status and barriers to healthy eating in this group. The procurement process is drawing to a close and a preferred contractor will be chosen by 18 December 2001. The development of protocols and questionnaires to be used in the study will commence in the New Year and following ethical clearance the fieldwork for the feasibility study is set to commence in May. Main stage fieldwork is due to commence in January 2003 and the results should be available from the study in 2005.

### **Nutrient Surveillance**

Reliable and up-to-date data on the nutrient content of foods are essential for the estimation of nutrient intakes from food consumption data. Within this programme, the Food Standards Agency funds a rolling programme of analytical surveys that provide up-to-date and reliable information on the nutrient content of foods. Data from these surveys are incorporated into the nutrient databanks that support national dietary surveys and are also disseminated via the UK food composition tables, *McCance and Widdowson's The Composition of Foods*.

The Agency is currently commissioning three analytical surveys, one on breakfast cereals, one on pasta and pasta sauces, and one on a selection of foods (from several food groups) for which an urgent need for new data has been identified. The results are expected to become available in early 2003.

### **Composition of Foods series**

For some 60 years, *McCance and Widdowson's The Composition of Foods* has been an authoritative and widely used source of information about the nutritional value of foods consumed in the UK. There are currently nine supplements on specific food groups, a supplement on fatty acids, and a summary 5th edition. Publication of a 6th summary edition is scheduled for 2002. Now that the series of supplements is complete, a comprehensive integrated dataset will be produced, comprising data from all supplements and the 6th edition, with one set of values only per food code. Work to compile this dataset has commenced.

The Agency is commissioning a review of the *Composition of Foods* series to consider how best to meet the needs of stakeholders in the future.

#### **6) N08: Dietary Surveys and Nutrients in Food (Research): Programme review 2002**

The main objective of this research programme is to ensure that the dietary surveys and analytical surveys carried out under the N10 programme are cost effective and that the data they generate are robust, of high quality, and are able to be translated effectively into information to support policy development.

Research conducted in this programme, which was established in 1991, falls under three main areas:

- The development of improved methods of nutrient analysis, particularly the separation and measurement of the different forms of certain nutrients that occur in foods;
- The validation of current methods and development of improved methods for collecting reliable, quantitative data on habitual food consumption; and
- Appropriate further analysis of data from Government dietary surveys to investigate factors associated with nutrient intake.

#### **7) N09: Food Acceptability and Choice**: Full programme review 1999 completed.

Workshop programme:

**November 2001:** Encouraging consumption of fruit and vegetables by young people: seminar on learning from current research projects

#### **Programme Review:** March 2002

The food acceptability and choice programme was established in 1991 as part of the MAFF Food Quality and Nutrition research and development portfolio. The focus of the programme has been to achieve reductions in percentage of energy derived by the UK population from fat and saturates (from 25% to 11% respectively), to increase the intake of fruit and vegetables and reduce obesity. A review of the work in 1999 indicated that there was still a need for the research and development being undertaken as part of this programme. Some of these areas have been specifically addressed by the development of new programmes.

**8) N12: Colonic Health:** New programme started April 2001

Colo-rectal cancer is of particular concern as it is the second most common type of cancer in western society, affecting 6% of men and women under the age of 75 years. The Government White Paper, *Our Healthier Nation*, set targets to reduce death rates from cancer by at least a fifth by 2010. The programme has been carried forward by the FSA as part of the nutrition strategic framework published in March 2001, and will complement work being undertaken in the Agency's Risk Assessment Programme, which includes work looking at food chemical risk assessment in relation to colonic health.

**9) Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals**

An important source of expert advice, the Agency is supporting work of the group determining upper safe levels for vitamins and mineral intakes sold as supplements. This will feed into the parallel Scientific Committee on Food Working Group. The outcome of this work will also contribute to the UK line in negotiating the EU Food Supplements Directive.

**10) National Food Survey**

From April 2001 the data collection stages of the NFS merged with the Family Expenditure Survey to form the Expenditure and Food Survey. The NFS will continue to report separately all be it under a different name (to be decided). As a result of the merger the coding frames have been reviewed, the major changes being made the eating out coding frame. The merger should result in more accurate recording of food consumption as all members of the household (11+) will be required to keep a diary of their food purchases. This has been demonstrated in the first quarter's results which show a higher nutrient intake than was shown in previous NFS reports.

**11) Fortification of flour with folic acid.**

The Food Standards Agency, together with Health Departments, has been considering the COMA recommendations on fortification of flour with folic acid as a route to reducing the incidence of neural tube defect-related births. Further work has been undertaken since a consultation on the recommendations took place earlier in the year. This work specifically in relation to technical issues of fortification and the masking of vitamin B12 deficiency in the older population is now complete. Recommendations on this issue are being prepared for the Food Standards Agency Board and Health Ministers.

**12) Schools**

Considerable Government activity is targeted at children in schools. The Agency role is principally to provide advice and research support to initiatives led by education and health departments. The Agency is supportive of a whole school, holistic approach that develops an integrated, sustainable way forward. To achieve our aims as they relate to activity in this area, work is undertaken through interventions (R&D activity), promotion/dissemination of learning (e.g. reports, workshops, seminars, etc.) and thorough direct contributions at steering, advisory and other meetings.

### **13) Dissemination of tools and good practice**

Catering for Health and seminars on eating well for looked after children are examples of the manner in which the Agency is promoting healthy food choice for the general population and vulnerable groups.

Catering for health is a practical guide for chef lecturers and caterers to foster healthy eating practices in catering establishments. The guide was developed by the British Nutrition Foundation with funding from FSA and DH. FSA are currently discussing with catering awarding bodies how the guide can be incorporated into courses to forward this aim.

Following the production of guidelines on eating well for looked after children and young people which was developed by the Caroline Walker Trust (with funding from FSA, DH and BHF), the FSA is promoting the guidelines to key social service personnel via regional training events. The events are aimed to stimulate incorporation of the guidelines into training programmes for those who care for children and young people and will be taking place in the New Year.

### **14) Scotland, Wales (and Northern Ireland) Activities**

The Food Standards Agency Wales in consultation with the National Assembly and other key players in the field is developing a strategy to address the problem of dietary inadequacies in the Welsh population generally but specifically in disadvantaged groups. Work has identified children and young adults; middle -aged men, and women of childbearing age as priority groups.

FSA Scotland is also developing an appropriate Nutrition Strategy based on the agreed overall strategic framework for the UK. Current work includes a Diet and Nutrition Forum for those working in the area to share their experiences.

A new Scottish Food and Health Co-ordinator has been appointed to lead renewed efforts to improve the nation's diet.