

UNILEVER'S POSITION ON DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE & HEALTHY DIETS

Key messages

- We believe all countries should have dietary guidelines to help its citizens to eat well.
- National food-based dietary guidelines (FBDG) should guide people towards diets that are good for both people and planet, but currently, there are no global food-based dietary guidelines covering both aspects.
- The FBDG should provide guidance to Food Manufacturers on how the products they create could fit into these guidelines.
- We need the development of global food-based dietary guidelines, supported by national standards and incentives. This to avoid multiple definitions of healthy and sustainable diets leading to confusion for consumers on daily food choices.

Key advocacy asks

- Development of global food-based dietary guidelines, supported by national standards and incentives, to guide consumers around the world towards more healthy and sustainable diets.
- We ask for the following aspects to be taken in consideration when developing sustainable & healthy FBDG:
 - Be science based
 - Include guidance on appropriate serving size and frequency of consumption rather than just focusing on nutrition quality
 - Drive the move to a more plant-based diet to help reduce consumption of meat and dairy
 - Stimulate biodiversity by encouraging dietary variety
 - Account for differences in local diet patterns
 - Acknowledge the role of food processing for safety, convenience and preservation and ensuring nutritional quality



Context

Globally, many governmental bodies and health authorities recognize the urgency to tackle the issue that a large part of the world's population is suffering from malnutrition, while the food system is contributing to exceeding planetary boundaries. The EAT Lancet Commission advocates the importance of food as the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental sustainability on earth. The commission proposed a Planetary Health Diet that provides guidance for the necessary shift, recommending increased consumption of plant-based foods – including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and whole grains – while substantially limiting animal source foods in countries where intakes are high. The report showed that global adoption of a planetary health diet would safeguard our planet and improve the health of billions.

National Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG) are set by governments and guide its citizens to eat well. FBDG are tools that can be used to promote healthy diets and can also serve as the basis for developing food, nutrition and agriculture policies. One important step that governments should take to support the shift to healthy and sustainable diets, is to develop and disseminate FBDG that embed both health and sustainability objectives.

Currently, there are no global guidelines covering both health and sustainability for food, despite the substantial and growing evidence base pointing to the need for dietary approaches to integrate these two aspects. The [Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems and Nutrition](#) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) seem the only visible evidence of global coordination and consensus. Only a limited number of countries have so far included sustainability in their FBDGs, but they may not be ambitious enough to bring food systems within planetary boundaries. In the meantime, multiple definitions of healthy and sustainable diets are used across governments, businesses, academia and civil society, leading to confusion for consumers on daily food choices.



Unilever's position

All countries should have dietary guidelines to help its citizens to eat well. These national food-based dietary guidelines (FBDG) should embed both health and sustainability objectives. The FBDG should provide guidance to Food Manufacturers on how the products they create could fit into these guidelines.

We believe the following aspects need to be considered when developing sustainable & healthy FBDG:

- Be science based
- Include guidance on appropriate serving size and frequency of consumption rather than just focusing on nutrition quality
- Drive the move to a more plant-based diet
- Stimulate biodiversity by encouraging dietary variety
- Account for differences in local situations
- Acknowledge the role food processing for safety, convenience and preservation and preservation and ensuring nutritional quality

Be science based

Sustainable & healthy guidelines need to be based on latest scientific consensus, and not be opinion or perception based. The guidelines should be data-driven, drawing on social and environmental science, and consumption data from population surveys and companies. The methodology to set the guidelines must be shared to build legitimacy and public trust and ensure effectiveness.

Include guidance on appropriate serving size and frequency of consumption rather than just focusing on nutrition quality

Only a minority of country FBDG convey servings or gram amounts in their key messages or food guides, and most often for fruits and vegetables. Vague recommendations are not only a problem for any quantitative analyses of FBDGs, but they also risk not being understood well by the general population. Clear proportions and quantities, as well as frequency of consumption guidance can be



very helpful for the purpose of monitoring consumption and cost of recommended diets.

Drive the move to a more plant-based diet

There is strong scientific evidence that moving to more plant-based diets is beneficial for both human and planetary health. Therefore, FBDG should recommend high consumption of plant-based foods – fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and whole grains – while substantially limiting animal sourced foods, especially those with higher environmental impact. This implies a need to set more ambitious targets on reduction of (red) meat consumption and to put less emphasis on dairy. In addition, in many national FBDG recommendations on plant-based protein sources, such as legumes and nuts and seeds, are currently either lacking or relatively vague. An easy step for consumers to move to a more plant-based diet is to swap meat and dairy for plant-based alternatives. Plant-based meat & dairy alternatives have a lower impact on the environment, while the nutritional quality is similar or can even be better and should therefore be recommended via FBDG.

Stimulate biodiversity by encouraging dietary variety

Seventy-five percent of the global food supply comes from only 12 plant and five animal species. Just three (rice, maize, wheat) make up nearly 60 percent of calories from plants in the entire human diet. While people may be getting sufficient calories, these narrow diets don't provide enough vitamins and minerals. The lack of diversity is thus a vital issue, particularly in the developing world where diets consist mainly of starchy, refined staples that are low in micronutrients and people have limited access to nutrient-rich sources of food. Dietary monotony is linked to a decline in the diversity of plants and animals used in and around agriculture (agrobiodiversity), threatening the resilience of our food system and limiting the breadth of food we can eat. This dependence on a limited pool of crop species leaves harvests vulnerable to pests, diseases and the impact of climate change. FBDG could help to recommend a wide



variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and grains. This will not only support dietary diversity but also help to restore agrobiodiversity.

Account for differences in local situations

There is not one size fits all approach. Tailor-made approaches are needed to enable the best diet shift in each country and for each population segment. Some countries would see their largest health gains from reductions in overall daily food intake and increased consumption of plant foods. Other countries would see the largest health gains from increased total daily food intake and adopting a more balanced diet, with even an increase in animal derived food intake. Equity and economic concerns are also important. Although many FBDG incorporate sociocultural factors to some extent, some FBDG could pay more attention to socioeconomic equity, inclusion of indigenous groups. Some populations worldwide depend on agropastoral livelihoods and animal protein from livestock. However, also in these populations it is important that recommendations for meat are presented in terms of moderate consumption, to prevent a swing from low consumption to excessive consumption, as is sometimes observed in the nutrition transition. Therefore, the guidelines should acknowledge alternatives to satisfy the protein requirement.

Acknowledge the role of food processing

The guidelines should acknowledge a role for processed foods. In many countries, processed foods provide a substantial contribution to consumers food intake, and this is not likely to change. Processing makes foods safe and keeps it at consistent nutritional quality. It also offers consumers wide availability and convenience. In addition, processing and packaging can be of big value in reducing the environmental impact of food consumption, by increasing shelf life, improving access by ensuring a continuous supply throughout the year, and therefore reducing food loss and waste. Currently there are several guidelines, especially in Latin America, recommending limitation of processed foods, but it would be better would be to steer consumption of foods with lower saturate fat, sugar, salt levels, and higher nutrient density.



Overall, FBDG for healthy and sustainable diets should include following elements:

- Balanced between energy intake and energy needs.
- A wide variety of sustainably sourced plant-based foods: fruits, vegetables, legumes, pulses, and (whole)grains (in all formats: fresh, frozen, dried, canned etc.)
- Meat & dairy to be consumed in moderate quantities, or replaced by (processed) plant-based (fortified) alternatives
- Small quantities of fish and aquatic products sourced from certified fisheries.
- A handful of unsalted seeds and nuts every day
- Use of plant-based oils and fats low in saturated fat and high in polyunsaturated fat
- Plain water or unsweetened tea or coffee in preference to other beverages
- Limited consumption of discretionary foods high in saturated fat, sugars or salt

Examples of FBDG where countries have started to consider both health and environmental impact are the Dietary Guidelines of the [Netherlands](#), [UK](#) and [Qatar](#).

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