

Strategic plan for food safety

African governments should adopt clear and coherent food safety policies as part of a comprehensive national strategy, based on the sharing of responsibilities for food safety between public authorities, industry and consumers and taking into account the entire food chain from farm to table.

This is one of the recommendations in a nine-point strategic plan for food safety in Africa that has been put forward for adoption by UN food and health agencies and the African Union. The outcome of the first pan-African food safety meeting, which was held under the auspices of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Harare, Zimbabwe in October, is aimed at reducing food-borne health risks and improving the safety of the food supply.

While all countries in Africa have some type of a food safety management system at national level, not all of these systems are effective and suitable for the purpose, according to a situation analysis conducted by the FAO's Africa regional office.

The plan also recommends that food control regulations should be promulgated and/or updated and food analysis and safety testing laboratories should be strengthened. Furthermore reference systems for the monitoring of food-borne diseases and coherent and effective food inspection programmes should be put in place, including the creation of an early-warning system for imported products which do not meet food safety standards.

Governments are also encouraged to increase their participation in Codex (Codex Alimentarius Commission) activities, with the establishment or strengthening of

national committees, and to solicit consumer involvement in food safety issues.

The estimated cost of the implementation of the plan over five years is US\$15.7 million.

Source: www.foodsafetyforum.org/african/index.asp

Nutritional strategy for Africa

Against a background of the deteriorating food and nutrition situation in Africa, as a result of stagnating economies and deteriorating health systems, as well as both man-made and natural disasters, an African Regional Nutritional Strategy (ARNS) has been developed for the decade 2005 - 2015.

A revision of the earlier ARNS 1993 - 2003 and taking into account issues, including the increasing burden of HIV/AIDS and diet-related chronic diseases (diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease) and the resurgence of TB and malaria, the strategy re-emphasises the role of nutrition in poverty alleviation strategies and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The major nutritional problems in the region are protein energy malnutrition, which is widespread, especially among children and women in the reproductive age group, and micronutrient deficiencies, in particular iodine, iron and vitamin A deficiencies. In all some 331 million people in Africa are estimated to consume less than 2 100 calories per day, of whom around two-thirds are chronically malnourished.

The objectives of the ARNS are to stimulate awareness and provide a framework for action on nutrition for governments and regional and international development partners. The priority areas addressed are:

- monitoring the food and nutrition situation

- advocacy and communication
- policy and institutional framework
- strengthening food and nutrition programme implementation
- integrating nutrition dimensions onto the development agenda
- strengthening institutional and technical capacity for nutrition at all levels (community to national)
- promoting community participation and involvement
- resource mobilisation.

The African Union is called upon to advocate for increased commitment by member states to nutrition and to foster networks and partnerships among professionals in the region and the UN and other organisations. Also it should establish a mechanism for strengthening the continent's technical and institutional capacity in nutrition.

Source: www.africa-union.org

Codex adopts vitamin standards

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has adopted global guidelines for vitamin and mineral food supplements, recommending that labelling contains information on maximum consumption levels of such supplements.

The guidelines, which are aimed at increasing consumer information, say that people should be encouraged to select a balanced diet to get the sufficient amount of vitamins and minerals, and only in cases where food does not provide sufficient vitamins and minerals should supplements be used.

The guidelines were adopted at the CAC's annual meeting in July, at which a total of more than 20 new and amended food standards were adopted. The CAC also decided to split its committee on food additives and contaminants into separate committees, beginning in 2007, in order to deal more



Members of the North West University Nutrition Research Group (Potchefstroom Campus).

effectively with each issue, and tentatively agreed to a task force addressing antimicrobial resistance.

Source:

www.codexalimentarius.net

Nestlé Nutrition Institute Africa awards

Experts in the field of nutrition received recognition by the Nestlé Nutrition Institute Africa (NNIA), Southern Eastern African region, at a special awards ceremony held to coincide with the International Congress of Nutrition in Durban.

The NNIA awards aim to acknowledge excellence in nutrition, to encourage and focus on development in nutrition in the region, to facilitate communication among scientists in the field of nutrition, to facilitate the dissemination of recent

developments in nutrition, and to make the NNIA and its objectives known to the nutrition and medical community.



Professor M G Herselman.

Four awards were presented in the following categories:

- The award for the **Best Scientific Publication** and a prize of R10 000 was bestowed on Dr B Makonnen and his co-workers (Professors A Venter and G Joubert) of the University of the Free State for their work on the effect of zinc supplementation in the management of children with protein energy malnutrition, which has contributed significantly to the revision of current policies on zinc supplementation.
- The award for a **Major Contribution to Community Nutrition** and a prize of R10 000



Dr B Makonnen.

was awarded to Mrs Caluza, coordinator of the Valley Trust Nutrition Education Programme, which has reached 210 educators and more than 10 000 learners in 20 primary schools in the Kwa Ximba area in KwaZulu-Natal.

- The award for a **Major Contribution to Clinical Nutrition** and a prize of R10 000 was made to Professor M G Herselman, who with her co-worker (Mrs N Esau) of the University of Stellenbosch is the innovator of the food exchange lists specifically designed for patients with renal disease, which fill a clinically important gap in the knowledge and practice of clinical nutrition in South Africa.

- The award for **Continued and Sustained Contribution to Nutrition**, which has a monetary value of R50 000, was presented to the North West University's Nutrition Research Group (Potchefstroom Campus) for its trans-disciplinary approach to address public health and relevant nutritional disorders, gene-nutrient interaction studies in cardiovascular disease, intervention studies on the biofunctionality of foods, and epidemiological studies on the health profiles of vulnerable population groups in the North West Province. The members of the Group are Professor H H



Mrs Caluza.



Professor *David Barker*.

Vorster (director), Professor C S Venter, Professor H S Kruger, Dr A Kruger, Professor J C Jerling, Professor W Oosthuizen, Dr H Wright, Dr M Pieters-Loots, Dr du Toit Loots, Ms Averalda van Graan, Dr S M Hanekon, and Sister M C Lessing.

- The **Danone International Prize for Nutrition**, with a monetary value of 120 000, was awarded to Professor David Barker of the University of Southampton, England at the International Congress of Nutrition in Durban.

The prize reflects the commitment of the Group Danone towards nutrition and is awarded every two years in recognition of the development of novel concepts in nutrition and the advancement of nutrition frontiers. Professor Barker's research challenged accepted theories about diet and disease in later life by establishing a link between low birth weight (due to fetal undernourishment) and the risk of heart disease in adult life.

The Group Danone has also recently completed the successful Caring for our Children campaign, which raised R1.4 million for children with cancer in Soweto.