

Concurrent Session 2: Nutrition Australia Symposium: Food Sustainability

Policy challenges and emerging priorities related to environmental sustainability and nutrition

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Background – Environmental sustainability and nutrition are integrally linked through the food system. The structure and operation of the food system are being stressed by nutrition demands and environmental constraints. Policy across and within the food system is required to protect and promote environmental sustainability and nutritional health.

Objective – To develop an analytical framework that can be applied across the different levels and sectors of government to help systematically identify emerging policy priorities in this area.

Design – A literature review of the nature and scope of the relationship between environmental sustainability and nutrition. Then a two-dimensional grid previously applied to the analysis of obesity prevention policy interventions was adapted to accommodate the literature review findings.

Outcomes – A systems approach to understanding the relationship between environmental sustainability and nutrition is indicated. The application of the two-dimensional grid identified emerging policy priorities including acting on policy anomalies and perverse incentives across the food system, developing reference standards, eg dietary guidelines, with an environmental dimension, including an environmental impact assessment in risk analysis decision-making and establishing information systems. Challenges include uncertainties in the environmental sustainability - nutrition relationship, broader political contexts, population growth, competing policy agendas and stakeholders' contested views.

Conclusions – The analytical framework helps organise and prioritise the planning, implementation and evaluation of policy interventions to tackle the environmental sustainability – nutrition relationship.

Food sustainability – a far from simple picture

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Background – Protection of the physical environment, ecosystems and ecological resources has become a prominent issue with substantial relevance for food production. Food production in general is an essential activity that is impacted by environmental determinants and that has significant environmental costs. Individual level food choices have potential to reduce environmental costs, and therefore could be the subject of dietary recommendations from governments and non government organisations. While simple consumption related recommendations are appealing, their ultimate relevance and impact within the complexity of the global food system may be less than expected.

Objective – Using the dairy industry as a case study, to review the conceptual basis of measures to minimise the environmental cost of food production and consumption. In addition, progress to date and developmental work underway will be outlined.

Design – Series of case studies from the Australian dairy food supply chain.

Outcomes – Business principles in addition to political imperatives have resulted in continual improvements in environmental practices in dairy food production in Australia.

Conclusion – Dietary recommendations to consumers that account for environmental health in addition to human health should be scientifically based, pragmatic, and likely to achieve what is intended without unintended adverse outcomes.