

## **Topical discussion session 4: Recommendations for sustainable dietary patterns in the political debate**

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### **1. Background and motivation**

Nutrition has an impact on human health and the natural environment. In the past dietary recommendations often have been developed by people with a health background. The share of food products for the total environmental impact e.g. of Swiss final consumption is about 20-25%, depending on the assessment method (Jungbluth et al. 2022). This environmental damage in turn also affects human health. For example, periods of heat in summer lead to deaths due to the climate crisis. If dietary recommendations are only focusing on one of the two aspects, both, human health and the environment suffer. In recent years dietary recommendations are becoming the subject of political debate and visible influence of stakeholder interests. In Switzerland e.g. the partly public founded organisations for promoting milk (Swissmilk) and meat (Proviande) consumption are trying to influence the debate<sup>1</sup> and promote more or at least the same amount of animal products to be considered in dietary recommendations. In Mediterranean countries there are e.g. conflicts between traditional food like fish and the clear conflicts with sustainability goals. Such developments might lead to sub-optimal recommendations from an overall health perspective. A report on sustainable nutrition prepared by ESU-services' tries to merge both aspects of diets, to ensure sustainability in a healthy and environmentally friendly way (Jungbluth et al. 2022).

### **2. Format of the session**

First and introduction to the theme has been given by the two organizers. Then some panellists provide short presentations giving the personal insights on the main questions tackled in the workshop. This is supplemented with opinion polls from the audience on different questions. Then we speak about the discussion points mentioned below. At the end main findings are summarised in a brief note.

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/esu-services-distanziert-sich-vom-greenwashing-den-publiereportagen/>

### 3. Main discussion points

**Input of panellists** The following key questions are addressed. The panellists are asked to report shortly about their national (or stakeholder experiences).

- What are the most relevant conflicting issues between health and environmental sustainability in terms of diets?
- Which stakeholders are participating in the debate on dietary recommendations and what is their motivation for the promotion of specific food items?
- Is there a scientific basis for weighting direct health, economic and environmental aspects?
- How can the conflicting goals between promoting scientifically based sustainable diets and stakeholders' interests be solved?
- How can we close the gap between scientific results and political outcomes of discussions?
- How can we better bridge the gap between long-term know ToDos and the actual developments regarding diets
- Which country specific differences are visible due to promoting food items with strong domestic interest groups and economic interests?
- Do you see measurable changes in average consumption patterns in the last 10 years to more sustainable diets?

**Electronic opinion polls of the audience** To make sure that the audience intervenes actively we will ask attendees for their opinion on the questions debated by the panellists via online voting systems Mentimeter ([Results of the voting](#)).

- What are the main conflicts for dietary recommendations if combining direct human health and indirect health and environmental effects? Amount of: Fats; Vegetables and fruits; Meat; Eggs; Milk and dairy products; Fish; Processed foods; Imported foods
- What are the main pressure groups promoting certain product groups against scientific evidence on their healthiness or environmental sustainability? Farmer and farmer organisations; Product associations (e.g. industries processing milk, meat, fish, novel food products, ....); Politicians (promotion of regional/national foods); Retailers; Pure scientists considering only one field; Others.

- What relevance should be given to each of the following sustainability dimensions when establishing dietary guidelines? Distribute 100 points. Direct health effects; Environmental impact including indirect health effects; Other Socio-economic aspects.
- How should dietary recommendation be set? Exclusively based on scientific evidence; Allowing different stakeholders with potential conflict of interest take part as well.
- Which country do you consider as a reference to follow in the unbiased promotion of sustainable diets in their dietary guidelines? Open answer.
- Do you consider promoting healthy plant-based meat and drinks in the dietary guidelines would help in the transition toward healthy diets with low environmental impact? Yes; Yes, but only if having the same price that animal-based ones; No.

#### **4. Detailed run of show including timetable and invited panellists confirmed**

General input by Niels Jungbluth and problem setting: 10 minutes and recommendations of LANCET as a bottom line, Ujué Fresán: 10 minutes

Oral input to key questions from a national/stakeholder perspective: 5 / panellist

Electronic voting on questions in previous chapter: Partly alternating with answers of the panellists

Additional experiences reported from the audience: 5\*3 (one from each continent) and oral statements by stakeholder groups: 5 each. Input from missing stakeholders: Industry, Government, Authorities, Nutritional societies/research

Discussion of organisers, audience, and panellists:

#### **5. Expected outcomes/take home messages**

The session should bring attention to the political debate on dietary recommendations and the underlying factors which make it difficult to implement changes which are necessary from an overall health perspective including issues caused by environmental impacts. Main Questions are:

- What are the main controversies regarding putting recommendations for sustainable diets?
- Is there scientific basis for balancing direct and indirect health effects? Should stakeholder interest be considered in dietary guidelines?

#### **6. Summary of the topical session on dietary recommendations**

We face challenges in bringing our LCA knowledge to real action and changes in consumption

patterns. Dietary recommendations are one possibility to influence consumption habits. It is not sufficient to focus on nutrients, but it is necessary also to look at product groups to prove a healthy and interesting diet.

Ujué Fresán (ES) presented the recommendations elaborated by the EAT-lancet commission for sustainable dietary recommendations.

Caroline Pénicaud (INRAE, FR) provided an input from the French perspectives. Maximum amounts of red meat, but not limiting poultry. Shifted to a little bit less meat. Meat consumption slightly decreasing, Pulses large decrease in the last 100 years.

Merja Saarinen (LUKE; FL). Organized process with a public hearing and expert hearing. Environmental aspects integrated good. Maximum for red meat consumption. Stakeholder interest mainly on animal and alternative products (with a clear involvement of alternatives). Generally it is accepted that health and environmental aspects have to be balanced out. An additional concern was that LCA is not capable of differentiating different agricultural practices. Nutrients in dairy alternatives are a major conflict and also combined production of beef is an issue. A conflict also arises if red meat (bad for health) is replaced with poultry.

Saioa Ramos (AZTI, ES). One portion pulses and potatoes. 4 p/week legumes. 3 portions fish, 4 eggs, 0-3 p/w meat (no differentiation for meat). Scientific committee. No differentiation with product groups like fruits which might not be suitable if we see large differences between different fruits (same for e.g. meat products). Fish is quite relevant. She thinks the variability within product groups should be better covered. NDR not much reflected in the society. Communication to consumers is a challenge as no translation for the society.

Niels Jungbluth (ESU, CH): New NDR are under development. Process for scientific background not optimal and no collaboration between nutritional and environmental sciences. No estimation of optimum diet from an environmental point of view. Good communication of dietary guidelines available and uptake e.g. in schools.

## **7. From knowledge to action: Summary of the workshop**

Several aspects of developing national nutritional recommendations were discussed in the topical session. Differences challenges faced in different countries. For a successful outcome of such a development different stages of development have to fit together:

- It is necessary to have a good and unbiased scientific background from different perspectives (health, environment) for key aspects of healthy and/or environmentally friendly diets
- Interfaces in research need to be identified properly (e.g. product groups or nutritional requirements)

- Stakeholder should be involved in the discussion of the scientific background covering also interest groups for emerging products and environmental issues. This should include an independent moderation for identifying undisputed points and areas of conflict.
- The decision making on dietary recommendations and final release should be made by an independent organisation not representing any stakeholders
- Good and clear communication on different channels and for different audiences should be prepared
- The recommendations should be taken up in political decisions making (e.g. school meals, education, training of kitchen staff, subsidies for product groups)

## **8. References**

Jungbluth N., Ulrich M., Muir K., Meili C., Bussa M. and Solin S. (2022) Analysis of food and environmental impacts as a scientific basis for Swiss dietary recommendations. ESU-services GmbH, Schaffhausen, Switzerland, retrieved from: <http://esu-services.ch/publications/foodcase/>.