

Key Dairy Outcomes and Wins

CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition

Background: The Committee on World Food Security (CFS), an inclusive intergovernmental platform that reports to the UN General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and to FAO Conference, provides an official platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all. In 2018, the CFS collectively agreed to develop the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, which provide a formally negotiated roadmap for countries and stakeholders to shape policies, recommendations and investments on a voluntary basis intended to make their food systems more sustainable and improve nutrition. The Guidelines are also intended to feed into the process of the UN Food Systems Summit. The Guidelines were endorsed by the CFS on February 10, 2021. Following are notable outcomes for dairy:

- **The documents do not define specific foods, such as dairy and meat, as inherently sustainable or not.** Earlier drafts sought to characterize all animal sourced and processed foods as not sustainable.
- **The document reflects the diversity of the global food system and rejects a one-size-fits all approach.** Recommendations are to be implemented “as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities.” This helps to ensure importance concepts of food sovereignty are reflected alongside the move towards more sustainable food systems.
- **Sustainable food systems are defined in a positive way that refers to the three dimensions of suitability that require consideration of social and economic dimensions of sustainability—not just environmental.** This is reflected throughout the document, but this internationally negotiated definition is notable:
 - *Sustainable food systems are food systems that enable food safety, food security and nutrition for current and future generations in accordance with the three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development. Sustainable food systems must be inclusive, equitable and resilient.*
- **The focus on malnutrition and under nutrition in children, defining them as conditions that must be overcome to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, supports dairy’s role in helping to support child nutrition.** Given the focus on youth in the UN FSS, this is a key result.
 - Most notably are: 1) paragraph 6 which focuses on malnutrition in children and 2) paragraph 7, which focuses on micronutrient deficiencies among subpopulations where consumption of dairy and other animal foods can address deficiencies.
- **The Guidelines make multiple references to concepts important to dairy in the food systems debate including:**
 - The necessity of adopting science and evidence-based policy actions to promote sustainable food systems and nutrition.
 - Costs and trade-offs, particularly in a nutritional context, must be considered so that recommendations intended to address environmental impact do not have a negative impact on nutrition, livelihoods, or culture.
 - Accountability, transparency, and participation, including the role of private sector as part of the dialogue and drivers of solutions and the need for transparent rules of engagement that do not single out any specific actors.

- The important role of private sector in working with governments to deliver sustainable food systems and nutrition.
- Food and beverage taxation (targeted at products high in fat, sugar or salt) is not mentioned in the document. One balanced reference to front-of-pack nutrition labeling is included (see below), but the Guidelines do not endorse or recommend warning labeling in contrast to the WHO's strong push for stop-sign type packaging warnings to simplistically discourage consumption of products high in fat, sugar or salt regardless of a product's nutritional benefits.
- **The document does not denigrate international trade or suggest that trade is a major driver of unsustainable foods systems as it had in earlier drafts.**
- **The Guidelines call for implementation consistent with international obligations. Codex, OIE, and IPPC standards, as well as WTO SPS and TBT agreements, are specifically reference throughout the document, including on priority dairy policy issues.**
 - Paragraph 44 states: *In implementing the VGFSyN governments are urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law...*
 - Paragraph 45 states: *In implementing the VGFSyN governments are urged to correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round³⁶.*
 - Section 3.1.1 c) calls for: *Acknowledging that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable, multilateral trading system will promote agriculture and rural development in developing countries and contribute to achieving food security and improving nutrition.*
 - Section 3.2.4 d) calls for governments that wish to do so to implement *...science and evidence-based FOPL schemes, (which could include interpretive and informative labeling), taking into account Codex Alimentarius Commission standards, guidelines and recommendations and other agreed relevant international and national standards...*
- **The definition of healthy diets creates opportunities for dairy without being prescriptive.**
 - Paragraph 17: *Healthy diets are those diets that are of adequate quantity and quality to achieve optimal growth and development of all individuals and support functioning and physical, mental and social wellbeing at all life stages and physiological needs. Healthy diets are safe, diverse, balanced, and based on nutritious foods. They help to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity and lower the risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases. The exact make-up of healthy diets varies depending on an individual's characteristics (e.g. age, gender, lifestyle and degree of physical activity), geographical, demographical, cultural patterns and contexts, food preferences, availability of foods from local, regional and international sources, and dietary customs.*
- **Nutritious foods are defined in a similar manner. Although there is no explicit reference to dairy or any other foods as healthy, the Guidelines establishes criteria that dairy meets.**
 - Paragraph 19: *Nutritious foods are safe foods that contribute essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals (micronutrients), fiber and other components to healthy diets that are beneficial for growth, health and development, guarding against malnutrition. In nutritious foods, the presence of nutrients of public health concern is minimized.*

- **Saturated and trans-fats are mentioned only once (para 20) and in the context of avoiding “excessive” consumption levels.**
 - The reference is included in the definition of “unhealthy diets” which qualifies that such diets are characterized by “excessive intake” of foods with these nutrients and results in outcomes, including high incidences of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
 - The addition of excessive is a critical win for dairy since dairy is under consumed in many parts of the world, and the connection to NCDs create an opportunity to showcase existing and emerging dairy research that dairy consumption does not contribute to risk of certain diet related cancers, CVD and diabetes.
 - A footnote acknowledging that research continues to evolve on nutrients was added, creating an opportunity to showcase dairy research on fat and CVD. The footnote reads: *Research continues to develop the understanding of the properties, risks and benefits associated with all nutrients. Such research contributes, among others, to balanced, science and evidence-based health reporting and advisories.*

- **Antimicrobial resistance is addressed in a balanced and globally representative manner.**
 - The Guidelines suggest countries “implement science and risk-based national plans taking into account” among other things, “international standards, guidelines and recommendations, adopted by the international standard setting bodies including those recognized by the WTO SPS agreement to promote and support prudent and appropriate use of antimicrobials...”. A specific call out for Codex is also included.
 - The inclusion of science and risk-based and the references are significant improvements and will provide a helpful bulwark against EU approaches to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) both in the EU market and globally.