

## **ALMATY FORUM 2004**

### **Towards Sustainable Food Fortification in Central Asia, Mongolia and Azerbaijan**

On the basis of national and regional experience and lessons learned developed during the first JFPR funded project and current international and regional guidelines and experience we recognize that:

- (i) In many countries of the region the nutrition status of many women and children continues to be poor with negative health consequences for children, families and constraining economic and social development.
- (ii) Iodine deficiency in pregnancy permanently damages the learning capacity of children.
- (iii) Iron deficiency causes serious damage, through poorer pregnancy outcomes, permanent impairment of cognition in young children, poor school performance, reduced work capacity among adults, and increased morbidity from infectious diseases and increased risk of heavy metal poisoning in contaminated environments.
- (iv) Zinc deficiency is associated with lowered immunity to infectious disease, slower child growth.
- (v) Folic acid deficiency in women, who become pregnant, contributes to congenital abnormalities of the central nervous system of the newborn and is an independent risk factor for coronary heart disease.
- (vi) The key B-vitamins, thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin are removed from wheat during flour milling along with most iron and folic acid. This contributes to micronutrient malnutrition among populations who consume large amounts of bread and other flour-based foods.
- (vii) Given the seriousness of the health effects of these micronutrient deficiencies, they must be eliminated as a public health problem.

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This roundtable strongly reaffirms the goals of appropriate universal fortification of salt and wheat flours.

Recognizing that the progress will vary among countries and between salt and wheat, it will be necessary to use country specific interim benchmarks to measure progress toward these goals. Goals and benchmarks are essential and must be used to accelerate progress toward these goals.

### **ESSENTIAL NATIONAL ACTIONS:**

Each country will:

- (i) complete the legislation and regulations requiring the appropriate universal fortification of salt and flour in the region.
- (ii) complete the establishment of an effective and high quality system for quality control and assurance of fortified salt and flour in each country.
- (iii) each country must create conducive conditions for procurement of fortificants and equipment for fortification.
- (iv) develop an effective national alliance for salt and flour fortification among government, industry, academia, producers as well as international and bilateral organizational partners. The alliance will encourage and provide oversight for implementation of permanent salt and flour fortification.
- (v) encourage regional cooperation, standards, expert advisory services and mechanisms to facilitate the fortification of salt and wheat flour, share country knowledge and experience and remove impediments to trade in these commodities.
- (vi) assure that all salt production facilities and flour millers have the motivation, commitment and capacity to produce fortified products.
- (vii) assure that the importance of consuming fortified salt and wheat products is understood at all levels of society.
- (viii) complete a third round of the Sentinel Study in each country to confirm the impact once fortification is adequately reaching the target population. Additional funding should be obtained for national micronutrient surveys.
- (ix) ensure imported salt and wheat products meet national standards.
- (x) look for ways to improve the trade in fortified foods including customs issues.

### **SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSAL SALT IODIZATION**

#### **I. Expansion/sustainability**

- (i) The governments will pass harmonized law on salt iodine level in all areas in all countries in the region.
- (ii) The government should allocate sufficient funds in a regular budget line to activities that maintain universal salt iodization, (e.g. procurement of inputs —

allocation for salt tests by food inspectors, allocation to local research for capturing developmental benefits, public education etc).

- (iii) Salt producers should finance necessary inputs for sustainable production (e.g. potassium iodate, packaging materials, and promotional efforts).

## II. Quality Control and Assurance

- (i) Authorized agencies will regularly conduct testing of salt and allocate budget for the testing in the regular budget.
- (ii) The need of countries for the use of establishing mobile iodized salt testing capabilities should be explored.
- (iii) The regulatory agencies should inform the public the findings from the quality control tests and industry inspections.

## III. Improved regulations

- (i) The government should put in place improved trade and tariff regulations to improve industry's access to potassium iodate and equipment.
- (ii) The use of the "Healthy Foods" logo should be regulated in terms of the quality of the products on which it should be used. KAN and UNICEF in cooperation with the salt and flour producers and governments agencies will develop appropriate guidelines

## IV. Shift in demand

- (i) The salt producers should conduct more frequent self-initiated promotional activities about the importance of iodized salt among their customers.
- (ii) Producers should review their customer base to ensure that all customers serving consumer markets (including food processing industry) actually order only iodized salt.

# **SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSAL FLOUR FORTIFICATION**

## I. Expansion/Sustainability

- (i) The association of flourmills should identify the size of mid-sized flour milling companies to fortify flour, and investigate feasibility and technology of fortification at small mills.
- (ii) The association of flourmills should obtain better information on the production and consumption of different types of flour and flour products in the region.
- (iii) Kazakh Academy of Nutrition (KAN) will develop better harmonization guidelines for fortified flour and methods for systems of quality assurance in the region.
- (iv) KAN will develop new premix formulas for special purposes such as local commercial production of fortified infant cereals, dilute premixes for small mills, premix formulas for application at bakeries, and ones that use the more bioavailable ferrous sulfate as the iron source in bakery flour and pasta.

## II. Quality Control and Assurance

- (i) The association of flour mills in each country, or as a new regional association, should call upon the Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI) the International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM) and similar organizations to seek help to strengthen milling associations in each country and the education they provide.
- (ii) Workshop(s) on flour fortification quality assurance and control will be conducted with assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- (iii) The governments milling associations and individual producers should enforce flour labeling.
- (iv) National Fortification Alliance in each country should give incentives for flourmills to produce quality fortified flour (e.g. award for excellence).
- (v) Regulatory agencies will regularly conduct testing of fortified flour. This requires sufficient budget allocation for the testing in the regular budget.
- (vi) SES should report the findings from the test and industry inspections to the public.
- (vii) Flourmills should be encouraged to periodically send samples of fortified flour to the Kazakh Academy of Nutrition for analysis in relation to compliance with recommended levels of micronutrients and KAN should provide feedback to national authorities in all countries on a timely manner.

### III. Improved Regulations

The government should:

- (i) require that imported 1st and premium grade flour be fortified to national standards.
- (ii) remove any legal barriers to production, sale and promotion of fortified bread or other baked products made from fortified flour.
- (iii) achieve regulations for universal flour fortification of 1st and premium grade flour in each country.

### IV. Shift in Demand

- (i) The government and flour mills should promote purchase of fortified flour by bakers and flour distributors.
- (ii) The government and flour mills should continue promotion and education of general public on why they should look for flour and bread with “healthy foods” logo.

### **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY**

- (i) Food producers, civil society, and NGOs should continue working on advocacy, for example,
  - to convince the government to allow producers to access foreign currency to buy flour premix,

to convince foreign donors of wheat to provide premix,

to convince the government to require that imported wheat flour and salt be fortified.

to establish regulations to allow multiple premixes for additional special uses, with support of the Kazakh Academy of Nutrition and premix manufactures.

- (ii) Bakers and other organizations producing products using flour and salt should become full partners in fortification efforts and will be convinced of the efficacy of fortified bread.
- (iii) The government and the communication group should assure that modules on micronutrient nutrition, including IDD, IDA, Vitamin A, and folic acid deficiency become well established and a regular part of both pre-service and in-service training for health professionals, teachers and a topic of regular orientation for key media staff.
- (iv) The appropriate government agencies should better inform communication groups including non governmental organizations (NGOs) concerning technical standards and recommendations related to flour and salt fortification and related nutrition issues.
- (v) The government, private sector, and NGOs should include ongoing monitoring and adjustments of communication activities to refine communication strategies to convey mutually reinforcing messages, and take into account needs of particular geographical areas or groups.
- (vi) Groups working on communication including NGOs should translate useful reports and information, including vitamin and mineral deficiency country damage assessment reports, as advocacy source for generating interest of the media and government in fortification and better micronutrient nutrition.
- (vii) Development agencies and projects, including the JFPR Project, UNICEF and international NGOs, working with communication groups of the country projects, with support of KAN, will organize and share all materials used for orientation and education of professionals in education, health, and other areas by JFPR9005 and others, and share findings and recommendations among the countries and at regional levels.
- (viii) The country project offices in collaboration with UNICEF will support capacity building of NGOs in areas related to demand generation for promoting fortified wheat flour and iodized salt.
- (ix) The communication activities of each country project should be better linked to related activities in health, education and nutrition (including GAIN).
- (x) The communication activities should be well coordinated in terms of timing and linkage with activities related to the supply of fortified flour and salt.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

- (i) Rework Appropriate national organizations and institutes, and international organizations will further collaborate in the development of monitoring mechanisms related to the effectiveness of major project activities to provide guidance and facilitate improvements that lead to achieving the goals of universal salt fortification and fortified wheat flour.
- (ii) The Kazakh Academy of Nutrition will develop an overall model and provide technical guidance for all countries supporting implementing sentinel studies and, at an appropriate time, country wide surveys to determine national effectiveness of universal salt iodization and widespread use of fortified wheat flour on the health of the populations. Surveys on USI need to be completed before the end of 2005 in order to allow monitoring of country achievements of the targets set in the US Special Session on Children ("A World Fit for Children).
- (iii) There should be operational linkage of the project efforts with National Nutrition Surveys and other relevant population surveys.
- (iv) The research community will collect indicators to supplement urinary iodine that relate to the demonstration of developmental benefit(s) in the population of improved iodine nutrition status.
- (v) NGOs and civil society should encourage citizen based monitoring activities to identify how the target group is benefiting.