

## Editor's Commentary

### More Food for Thought on Food-Based Dietary Guidelines

In this supplement, the authors have chronicled detailed descriptions and comparisons of the food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) of six Southeast Asian nations. The appeal of the authors on the need for more effective communication of the messages should be heeded by all healthcare sectors – government, industry, academia – as well as professional societies and consumer associations. Indeed, FBDGs are not meant for healthcare practitioners only; the messages are, as importantly if not more so, for the general public as well. Thus, there should be more concerted strategic efforts among the various stakeholders in disseminating FBDG messages through various communication channels, including new media networks to reach young population groups. Presently, the FBDGs lack visibility among the general population, and offering simplified messages is one way forward towards increasing public awareness of the dietary guidelines.

In relation to enhancing the public's understanding of healthy dietary guidelines, I wish to draw attention to a new landmark joint publication of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Food Climate Research Network (Fischer & Garnett, 2016). In reviewing country FBDGs, this document "explores if and how countries incorporate sustainability in their FBDG." There is increasing global interest for developing guidelines which advise on dietary patterns that align health and environmental goals. This document provides examples of country FBDGs and research evidence to exemplify how dietary patterns that have low environmental impact can be consistent with good health. Four countries were cited as having such characteristics in their FBDGs, namely Brazil, Germany, Qatar and Sweden.

In order to incorporate the environmental impact of diets, the FAO document stressed on the need for several salient and practical guidelines to be put in place at the policy and program implementation levels. These include:

- People are informed about the relationships between food and sustainability and people are informed about the need for such dietary patterns.
- Guidelines should consider current consumption patterns and the cultural context, so they do not 'stretch' people unrealistically.
- The environmental benefits of limiting over-consumption of all foods.
- Provide clear guidance on
  - Food waste reduction.
  - Which fruits and vegetables to seek out in preference to others.
  - Safe and energy efficient food preparation.

As the countries in the region consider reviewing their FBDGs or developing FBDGs for the first time, the impact of food systems on the environment and broader sustainability issues should be appropriately incorporated. This will be in line with the clarion call worldwide for emphasising on dietary patterns that impose a low burden on environmental limits. Such dietary patterns would represent marked improvement "on the way people currently eat, a point that is true both in countries where the main problems are

those of over-consumption and non-communicable diseases, and in contexts where diets lack diversity and where hunger and under-consumption are of critical concern”.

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## **REFERENCE**

Fischer CG, Garnett T (2016). *Plates, Pyramids, Planet: Developments in National Healthy and Sustainable Dietary Guidelines: a State of Play Assessment*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and The Food Climate Research Network at The University of Oxford.