

Report of ILSI Europe-organized International Symposium “Functional Foods in Europe - International Developments in Science and Health Claims”, Malta, 9-11 May, 2007

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< Summary >

Background of this symposium: For functional foods to have a place in public health it will be necessary to optimize both the nutritional value and taste. With increasing knowledge of human genetics food may play a role for the individual needs and predispositions. Also, emerging food technologies can potentially lead to increased safety, convenience, quality and nutritional value, but these new technologies will be an asset if only their application is transparent to the consumer.

The aim of the symposium was 1) to review the current status and future of scientific substantiation of health claims, 2) to explore consumer understanding, behavior and communication, 3) to assess the current regulatory milieu on health claims, 4) to determine the impact of the regulation on health claims and innovations in the functional food area, and 5) to investigate the future challenges and opportunities for functional foods.

Around 300 experts from universities, food related companies, government and research institutions representing 44 countries including 7 from Japan were participated. The Japanese members were composed of 3 industry researchers, 2 from academic sectors and 2 from ILSI Japan.

Messages from the symposium may be separated into 4 parts:

On claims were reports including different approaches taken to formalize the scientific substantiation of claim in various countries. The needs for high quality human intervention studies in supporting claims made on foods were emphasized.

The issue of nutrition profiles was highlighted, although it is revealed as not a simple approach. It was emphasized that a profile of one food does not necessary have to match the overall profiles of a balanced diet.

Another important issue for functional foods is risk-benefit analysis. For consumers to comprehend, the safety of functional foods should be benchmarked to other foods, rather than chasing zero risks.

Finally, consumer understanding of health claim generally regarded as an utmost important issue. Consumers do not see functional foods as a separate and specific category of foods, and it is a

formidable challenge to communicate dietary advice to consumers in such a way that their behavior is actually changed for the better.

Followings were conclusions of the roundtable discussion to summarize above mentioned issues (cited from Carina Madsen: Symposium Report, *Ann Nutr Metab*)

1) The EU regulation on claims represents a positive contribution to the future development of functional foods in Europe. 2) Continued research in the field of food functionality will be important in sustaining the current upward trend in innovation of functional foods. 3) Education will be important in raising consumers' awareness of the Potential benefits. 4) Labelling claims could play a significant role in the educational process.

An emphasis should be given, especially to Japanese experts, that the definition of functional foods in EU turned out to be seriously different from ours through the EU presentations. According to the EU point of view, functional foods seem to be regarded as those of more like "natural" foods, whereas Japanese FOSHU is rather regarded as medicine-like substance than foods. An extensive discussion hereafter will be needed to make on this issue between EU and us as well as among ourselves.