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# DAIRY Nutrition Digest

SCIENTIFIC NEWSLETTER ON NUTRITION AND HEALTH

The «*Dairy Nutrition Digest*» is EDA's quarterly scientific newsletter providing the latest science-based information on dairy-related nutrition and health topics. Scientific articles are summarised in user friendly language for a broad audience.

## - SPECIAL EDITION -

### EDA Policy Conference, 20 March 2013, Brussels

On Wednesday March 20, the European Dairy Association (EDA) organised a Dairy Policy Conference in Brussels. The topic of the Nutrition & Health session was: "Health, a focus point in European policies, asks for a holistic approach. Dairy, a whole food, not just a few nutrients".

Two academic speakers showed the latest science about the important nutrient contribution of dairy foods at different ages and the health benefits of dairy as whole food. The third speaker spoke about whether and how this science is reflected in EU health policy and what changes might be needed to overcome current shortcomings. The panel discussed the need for a holistic approach in European health policy-making shifting from single nutrients to whole foods and diet when developing policy.

*Conference programme*

### Dairy as a whole food: what is the importance of dairy in health across all ages?

Prof Jean-Michel Lecerf, Institut Pasteur de Lille, France

The nutrient richness and specific matrix effects of dairy products make these naturally nutritious foods useful for health and nutrition at any age.

Professor Jean-Michel Lecerf from the Institut Pasteur de Lille spoke about the importance of dairy in health across all ages. Milk and dairy products are nearly a complete food with almost all macronutrients and all micronutrients essential for healthy life. Milk is a natural food that contains the most nutrient diversity among all available food to humans. Milk should be regarded not only as the sum of its nutrients but that the matrix effects should be considered. This is specific to dairy products, which contain a lot of nutrients that are able to interact favorably. Dairy products thus have positive effects on weight management, metabolic syndrome, colorectal cancer incidence, bone health and cardiovascular disease. The incredible nutrient richness and the specific matrix effects make naturally nutritious dairy foods useful for health and nutrition at any age.

*To Prof Lecerf's presentation*

## Case study: how can dairy improve the health of elderly persons?

**Dr Rosalie Dhonukshe-Rutten, Division of Human Nutrition, Wageningen University, The Netherlands**

**Dairy can fit into a healthy diet and improve the health of elderly people who are often deficient in many nutrients present in dairy foods.**

Dr Rosalie Dhonukshe-Rutten from the Wageningen University spoke the role of nutrition with regards to ageing. It is crucial to not only look at the well-known calcium, but also to be aware that elderly people do not consume enough vitamin D and B12, and that they often have a too low energy and protein intake. These important nutrients are very present in dairy products. Dairy can improve the health of elderly people and fit easily into a healthy diet. Dietary advice to elderly people should include nutrient dense foods, such as dairy products.

*To Dr Dhonukshe-Rutten's presentation*

## Dairy is good for us; how to reflect this in EU policies.

**Mr Jørgen Hald Christensen, Director Danish Agriculture and Food Council and Chair of the EDA Food and Environment Policies Committee**

**Dairy is not getting the attention it deserves, as European food regulation focuses negatively on single nutrients. Consumer education needs to circle around positive messages on healthy eating including nutrient-rich dairy foods. A holistic approach is needed.**

There is a discrepancy between the science showing that dairy is good for us and its insufficient reflection in European health policies. Dairy consumption is recommended in dietary guidelines all over Europe and major scientific studies confirm the natural nutrient richness of dairy foods and the positive associations between dairy and health. European health policies, however, focus on single negatively perceived nutrients (too much saturated fat, added sugar, salt, etc.) and items to avoid. Positive messages about foods such as dairy's nutrient richness are not (sufficiently) considered. Looking at the EU claims regulation, the paradox is that one can claim that calcium is good for bones, but not that milk is good for bones.

*To Mr Christensen's presentation*

## Panel discussion and conclusion

**The focus of EU health policy should shift from single, negatively perceived to whole foods and diets. The dairy community faces certain constraints in the communication of science around health benefits of dairy, while others have freedom of speech. A serious check of the EU health policy system might be needed.**

All nutrients are good when eaten in the recommended amounts and it is important to consider how they interact and function in the diet. Current public health policy is confusing for consumers who have difficulties to translate single nutrient information in a healthy and balanced diet. It is difficult for consumers to translate single nutrient information into a healthy and balanced diet, especially since consumers react best to positive and simple messages.

Current EU legislation puts constraints on the dairy (and other food) industry, health care professionals and others to communicate good things about their products. A service check of EU health policy system might be needed to avoid a situation where the dairy industry cannot claim on the health benefits of its products while people outside the business (e.g. advocacy groups and media) can freely communicate, even false messages.

A holistic approach, looking into the total nutrient composition and matrix effects of foods is necessary, and it should be a priority for the dairy sector to convey this message to the public authorities. The time is right for the dairy sector to join forces with other supporters of nutrient rich basic foods and communicate together.

*To the EDA Key messages | To the EDA Conference summary report*