



The Role of Food Processing in Delivering Healthy, Sustainable Diets

For a diet to be sustainable, according to the World Health Organization and FAO, it should be healthy, affordable, adapted to regional and local food habits and consistent with planetary boundaries. ¹

Processed foods are a vital part of the world's food supply and essential to delivering nutritious, affordable, accessible and sustainable diets to people around the world.

As leading food and beverage manufacturers we recognize the critical role we play to help feed a growing global population. The International Food & Beverage Alliance (IFBA) was established in 2008 with a mandate to help consumers around the world achieve balanced diets and healthy, sustainable lifestyles.

In 2014 IFBA members adopted a commitment to “continuous product improvement and innovation with the goal of making available food choices that help people eat healthy, balanced diets.” In support of that commitment, members are delivering safe, nutritious, high-quality and enjoyable products that can positively influence the diets of people around the world:

- innovating and expanding our portfolios to make products that are better for people and the planet;
- investing in innovation to deliver important food groups that contribute to a balanced diet and improved nutritional content;
- creating products to suit local needs; and
- offering products that are affordable and accessible.

Food safety is a priority. Formulation and processing techniques are scientifically developed and designed to deliver food that is safe, free from harmful chemical contaminants and micro-organisms that could cause food-borne illnesses. It acts to prolong shelf-life, delaying food spoilage and reducing food waste; and provides access, regardless of economic status, to affordable and convenient products.

Access to food is one of the biggest challenges we face globally, with some areas being deprived of even basic foods. Preservation and storage techniques improve food security by increasing the availability and stability of the food supply across seasons and geographic regions ² and can help to alleviate malnutrition due to poor food distribution. ³

Processing can improve the nutritional profile of foods and beverages. IFBA members have reformulated and innovated tens of thousands of products, reducing salt, sugar and fats; eliminating industrially produced trans fat; increasing the content of essential nutrients and food groups of need (e.g., fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy) to ensure the incorporation of healthier, nutrient-dense products into diets. We are developing more low- and no-calorie products and portion control options which help people to enjoy their favourite foods as part of a varied diet.

Food fortification is a processing technique widely recognized as an impactful and cost-effective nutrition intervention, contributing essential nutrients to help prevent deficiencies and their associated health problems in certain populations. ⁴ We are addressing these nutrition gaps in diets by delivering positive nutrients and helping to alleviate undernutrition and reduce the risk of malnutrition with micro-nutrient fortified foods and beverages.

Several IFBA members are also working to enhance the availability of foods to support the health and well-being of consumers with specialized nutrition products, e.g. for people with allergies or intolerances to eat a balanced and varied diet; incorporating functional ingredients such as fibre, and pre- and pro-biotics to enhance gut health ⁵ - or antioxidants and other bioactive compounds to help reduce oxidative stress and its associated diseases ⁶ and producing age-specific products – for infants to improve growth and development, through to seniors to support healthy ageing.

IFBA members have supported the UN, the WHO and government strategies through a series of actions aimed at improving global health and nutrition, including, the adoption of the first-ever collective commitment by the food industry to implement globally set standardized targets for sodium reduction in manufactured foods by 2025 and 2030 and the adoption of the WHO's objective to eliminate industrially produced trans-fat from the global food supply by 2023. In May 2023, IFBA announced its members had achieved 100% compliance with its commitment.

Industry efforts are having a positive impact. A recent study in the U.K. demonstrated that reformulation efforts by the industry are helping consumers to improve their diets. Results show that the average U.K. shopping basket is healthier today - with 13% fewer calories, 15% fewer sugars and 24% less salt than in 2015. ⁷

Processed foods can help consumers make achieving a healthier diet more feasible by reducing the investment of energy, time or cooking skills needed for meal planning and food preparation and by providing quick and portable options that are also nutritious, affordable, available and of high quality.

We are helping consumers to make informed food choices. We provide transparent and clear nutrition information and an easy-to-understand approach to labelling. Ninety-nine percent of IFBA members' products globally display nutritional information on pack and 94% display calories front-of-pack.

IFBA members will continue to do their part to help drive progress towards the adoption of healthy and sustainable diets.

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¹ FAO, WHO. Sustainable healthy diets: guiding principles, 2019.

² Knorr D, Watzke H. Food Processing at a Crossroad. *Front Nutr.* 2019 Jun 25;6:85.

³ Conway C. One billion hungry: can we feed the world? Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012.

⁴ Olson R, Gavin-Smith B, Ferraboschi C, Kraemer K. Food Fortification: The Advantages, Disadvantages and Lessons from *Sight and Life* Programs. *Nutrients.* 2021 Mar 29;13(4):1118.

⁵ Markowiak P, Śliżewska K. Effects of Probiotics, Prebiotics, and Synbiotics on Human Health. *Nutrients.* 2017 Sep 15;9(9):1021.

⁶ Erika Fleming, Yangchao Luo. Co-delivery of synergistic antioxidants from food sources for the prevention of oxidative stress, *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research*, Volume 3, 2021

⁷ Food and Drink Federation (FDF). Kantar Worldpanel Take Home data for FDF members, total nutrient volumes in 2022 vs 2015.