

Concept Note – Agreeing on regional targets for the salt/sodium concentrations in key food categories in the Americas

Definitions

Key food categories – the most common food categories selected for reformulation of salt/sodium content that have been identified by the five countries in the Americas with the most comprehensive reformulation initiatives – Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile and the NSRI

Maximum value – the upper limit for salt/sodium concentration for a food category or product accepted by public health authorities and food companies to be technologically feasible and acceptable to consumers, yet sufficient to achieve a public health impact.

Regional target for salt/sodium concentration – a maximum value for salt/sodium concentration per 100g of food product derived from the maximum values/upper limits set by countries in the Americas

Background

The first Consortium meeting was held in 2012 where members agreed to several main lines of work. At a second meeting, members accepted a Five-year Strategic Plan (2013 to 2018). Of the five objectives in the Plan, they chose to begin with two: social marketing and harmonization of targets. A sub-group of members agreed to work on each of the objectives. Also during the second meeting, members drafted a creative brief for a social marketing campaign.

With 12 countries in the Region having formal initiatives to reduce the overconsumption of salt, and expecting the number to grow, given that salt intake reduction is among the WHO global indicators key to reducing NCDs, it is timely for the Consortium to address target harmonization. The intention is to support the harmonization of targets for food groups common to multiple countries, leveraging on existing national targets in order to support the broader application of such targets throughout the region. Achieving this objective will benefit both national public nutrition initiatives and the food industry: countries that intend to set targets for reformulations, but may not have the resources to do so individually, can take advantage of the investments made and lessons learned by others to establish targets and timelines; and food companies can migrate to harmonized formulations for same-products supplied to markets in the Region.

PAHO TAG has prepared a Guide to assist countries in setting their own targets.¹ For countries that lack the capacity to do so and to advance the Consortium's objective on harmonization in the Region, TAG has compiled the targets and timelines for nine food categories common in five countries – Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile and the USA (NSRI). In

¹ Guide for setting targets and timelines to reduce the salt content of food, 2013, http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=21493&Itemid=

these countries, food categories for reformulation and targets were agreed upon through negotiations between public health authorities and the food industry, with assistance from independent food technology experts, and in some cases inputs of consumers.²

What are most feasible to transfer from the five countries above to those that intend to have reformulations are the targets that are maximum salt/sodium concentrations per 100g of food product. Targets based on maxima are not only a straightforward concept for the food industry and consumers, the process of deriving and re-deriving the targets and ongoing monitoring, given the downward shift expected in maxima as reformulations proceed, is more feasible using maxima than averages or sales-weighted averages.

The identification of key food categories and corresponding regional targets for them, however, does not preclude countries from deriving sales weighted averages or averages as additional targets for the salt/sodium content of foods nor from setting targets for other food categories or establishing more stringent national targets, either voluntary or mandatory. Regional targets nevertheless will support expansion and consistency of salt/sodium reduction efforts into a broader number of countries, leveraging multisectoral efforts in this area.

The process below is proposed to advance the agreeing upon regional targets for key food categories. For each step and its outcomes, there are roles and contributions for each of the sectors represented in the Consortium – countries, the food industry, civil society, TAG and PAFNCD.

² Targets and timelines for food categories in common in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile and the National Salt Reduction Initiative in the United States,
http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=25647+&Itemid=999999&lang=pt

Proposed process to agree upon regional targets

Codes of conduct on transparency, full disclosures and declarations of conflicts of interest will be applied as needed.

Step	Outcomes	Roles and contributions
1) Confirm the role of regional targets in target harmonization in the Region	Consortium consensus on principles to guide agreement on and dissemination, maintenance and monitoring of regional targets	All Consortium members agree to the Consensus Statement
2) Agree upon regional targets	A harmonized maximum value for salt/sodium concentration per key food category or food product as mg Na per 100g for a given year Plan for progressively lower regional targets for the salt/sodium concentration of common staple foods	All Consortium members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> confirm the key food categories/ products confirm the maximum target per key food category/product identify a schedule for revisiting the regional targets identify options for monitoring adherence to the established targets
3) Promote and disseminate regional targets	Consortium members endorse the regional targets as a means to advance harmonization and participate in encouraging uptake by food companies supplying key products in the Region, particularly in markets without national targets Civil society entities endorse the regional targets and participate in their promotion and monitoring	PAFNCD circulates the regional targets PAFNCD/PAHO/TAG support countries to build capacities necessary to set regional targets
4) Demonstrate and report on progress towards meeting the targets	Publication of food industry pledges to the targets Up-to-date food composition databases Verified label data Public awareness of food company performance	MONITORING <i>Options for data collection</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> industry voluntarily and regularly provides food composition data on products in the key categories to an independent institution industry voluntarily and regularly provides label data on products in the key categories to an independent institution an independent institution collects product samples and label data civil society entities collect label data EVALUATION <i>Options for verification of label data</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an independent entity chemically analyzes a sub-set of products for label accuracy civil society entities monitor accuracy of label data <p>REPORTING ON ADHERENCE TO TARGETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAFNCD using results of data analyses reports publicly on adherence Civil society entities report publicly on adherence
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Assumptions

- composition data supplied and / or label data collected
- an independent entity conducts chemical and / or label analysis
- ongoing collection of maximum values per food categories / products
- as maxima adjust downwards, regional targets adjusted accordingly
- capacities and resources for the initiative maintained