



# REGIONAL GUIDE

*AMRO: AMERICAS REGION*



2019 AMWHO AT UNC REGIONAL CONFERENCE

# SUMMARY

The World Health Organization's Americas Region (AMRO) includes thirty-five member states throughout North America, Central America, and South America. The region possesses a variety of developing and developed economies, rural areas and urban population centers, and widespread agricultural production. These characteristics lead to a diverse range of food concerns within the region, from addressing the rise in noncommunicable diseases to ensuring food security.

In recent years, many multinational food corporations have taken up space within the Americas region, offering affordable food options that often contain little nutritional value. For example, Haiti currently imports 90% of its food.<sup>1</sup> As the region experiences this influx of globalized food options, it has also seen a decrease in traditional staples, such as potato or cassava, which may form an integral part of a country's identity. When addressing the global food predicament, it is important that delegates consider how food and food policy can support or diminish the region's wide variety of cultures.

When addressing the social determinants of health within the region, consistent access to nutritious foods is a necessary step to achieving better health outcomes. The region often faces challenges to food security because of its propensity for weather-based events and emergencies, such as El Niño and La Niña, hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires. Additionally, a substantial portion of the regions' citizens face unique food security challenges during migration processes. When addressing food access, the delegates should take into account these unique characteristics of the Americas region that serve as barriers to adequate food security.



Strengthening economies have brought improved sanitation to much of the region, contributing to its current status as having the second-lowest burden of foodborne diseases within all regions.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, more than 2,000 children in the Americas die from foodborne illness each year.<sup>2</sup> Taking into account the substantial amount of illness that still stems from foodborne pathogens in the Americas, the region emphasizes the need to strengthen foodborne illness surveillance systems and outbreak response protocols. Additionally, changes in the region's socioeconomic status have contributed to a rise in noncommunicable diseases, many of which are preventable and can be impacted by dietary decisions.<sup>1</sup> Resolutions concerning food-related illnesses should be comprehensive in their effort to address both foodborne and chronic diseases.

Taking the above factors impacting the region into account, the Americas region has chosen to focus on globalization, food security, and food-related illnesses within this regional guide. It encourages delegates to use the following case studies to serve as a basis for potential policy solutions under each theme, and commends all delegates for their dedication to addressing the global food predicament.



# GLOBALIZATION OF FOOD

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), globalization is viewed as a reduction in cross-border movement of goods, services and capital with accelerated integration of world markets and increased the flow of commodities, technologies, information, financial capital, modes of distribution and marketing, and, to an extent, migration of peoples.<sup>3</sup> For many low-income individuals, multinational companies have provided an inexpensive option of food to their country's existing food landscape. Large companies such as PepsiCola, Nestle and Kellogg's have taken advantage of lower income populations and used their influence to enter into the market of inexpensive, conventional food for the busy, low-wage worker. For example in Brazil, Nestle has expanded its reach by employing local women as door-to-door vendors.<sup>4</sup> However, these cheap options are known to be of little to no nutritional value.

In the Americas region, Chile has served as a prime illustration of the effects of globalization on the nutrition behaviors and related health outcomes, and also creating a solution to address it. In a culture where fresh seafood and local crops served as staples of each region, these multinational food corporations have interfered with the Chilean culinary landscape.<sup>5</sup> Until the late 1980s, malnutrition was widespread among Chile, and at even higher rates among children. Only 30 years later, Chile leads the world in child obesity rates, with over 50% of the nation's six year olds being overweight or obese.<sup>6</sup> This increases the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and musculoskeletal disorders at a much younger point in life. Some Chilean government officials believe food companies have contributed to this drastic shift.

Critical of these multinational companies' impact on the health of its citizens, Chile has enforced strict regulations on marketing, specifically towards children. It's food law as enacted a number of measures, including the removal of cartoons on high sugar cereals, and toys for children inside candy, such as the popular Kinder Surprise. In addition, it barred the sale of junk food in schools. The law also prohibited the advertising of high fat and sugar foods during children's television programs and websites. In the next year, the advertisement of foods that fall into this category will be taken off entirely from tv, radios, and movie theaters from 6am to 10pm.<sup>6</sup> Support for these measures were reinforced by the World Health Assembly's 2010 Guidance on Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children that aimed to protect breastfeeding, prevent obesity and chronic diseases, and to promote a healthy diet.<sup>7</sup>

However, these strict measures did not come without opposition from these large multinational companies. The lobbying power influence of these organizations made the initial law difficult to pass.<sup>8</sup> Since then, three multinational manufacturers have taken the law to court. Despite this challenge, other countries have followed Chile's example. Similar laws protecting the nutrition of young children have been enacted in other countries in the Americas region, including Peru, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Brazil, while many are considering enacting them.<sup>8</sup>



# GLOBALIZATION OF FOOD

Though it is too early to assess the impacts of the two year-old law, regulation on sugary and high fat foods has proven successful in the past for Latin American countries. In 2013, the Ministry of Health in Ecuador approved new standards for food labeling.<sup>9</sup> Food companies were given 12 months to implement front packaging that indicated the levels of sugar, fats, and sodium into a “stoplight” with 3 alert levels – red being the highest and green the lowest. Since the implementation of these regulations, there has been a 35% decrease in sales of products with high sugar, fat and salt in Ecuador.<sup>9</sup> Using these countries as a guide, delegates could adapt this to their respected countries by developing guidelines for advertising and nutrition labeling to susceptible populations. To supplement this, interventions could be put into place to restore the culinary landscape of each country, such as subsidizing farmers markets to support local farmers and promote the consumption of fresh crops. Together, this creates a hopeful outlook for countries who enact similar policies to protect the health of its citizens from large food manufacturers.



# FOOD SECURITY

The World Health Organization defines food security as existing when people lack access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food, and are therefore not consuming the food required for normal growth and development for an active and healthy life.<sup>10</sup> The subtheme of food insecurity is an important issue throughout the Americas region. In Latin American and Caribbean countries, hunger affects 6.1% of the population, for a total of 37 million people suffering from the effects of food insecurity.<sup>11</sup> However, food insecurity is not only isolated to smaller or lower-income countries. 1 in 8 households in Canada are food insecure, amounting to over 4 million residents.<sup>12</sup> Despite statistically being one of the most wealthy countries in the world, 15 million households in the United States of America reported being food insecure at some point during the year in 2017, 13 totaling up to 40 million people yearly. Of these 15 million households, 5.8 million reported having very low food security, meaning that the food patterns of one or more household members were disrupted, and food intake was reduced.<sup>13</sup>

A solution to the food security issue in the United States can target taking excess food waste to supplement food insecure households. In the US, 150,000 tons of food are wasted each day. This amounts to almost a pound of food wasted per person everyday.<sup>14</sup> While individual consumers who produce food waste need to reduce their waste impact, larger bodies such as grocery stores also have responsibilities. Only four of the ten largest grocery stores in the United States have specified food waste reduction commitments.<sup>15</sup>

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act was a law passed by the United States government during the Clinton administration to reduce the production of food waste. Named after Representative Bill Emerson, a champion for creating policies to end hunger, this law encouraged the charitable donations of food from primarily grocery stores and restaurants, to nonprofits by minimizing the liability of donors.<sup>16</sup> Historically, these establishments had thrown away food nearing the expiration date set by manufacturers or prepared food that went unfinished out of fear of being held liable for gross negligence. This law set the foundation for the Federal Food Donation Act 2008 that extended the liability exemption to federal agencies to donate excess food.



# FOOD SECURITY

While the act is largely underpublicized, organizations such as the North Carolina-based Food Connection have utilized this exemption to provide high-quality prepared foods to nonprofits that serve populations that are food insecure. Food Connection specializes in food recovery by partnering with local restaurants and caterers to collect surplus food that would otherwise be thrown out and delivers them to organizations and agencies that serve those in need.<sup>17</sup> The idea of food recovery has grown among researchers and activists in awareness and popularity over the past couple of years, and will continue to expand.

This organization has served as an innovative example of how non-profits can be the mediator between public and private sector policies. With more knowledge of this act and similar policies that appeal to multiple stakeholders, it may be possible to persuade more grocery stores and restaurants to donate quality, healthful foods to vulnerable populations.



# FOOD-RELATED ILLNESSES

Each year across the Americas region, 77 million people fall ill from foodborne illnesses.<sup>2</sup> The main pathogens associated with foodborne illnesses in the Americas region include Norovirus, Campylobacter, E. coli, and non-typhoidal salmonella.<sup>2</sup> The presence of these pathogens within the foods of the Americas region poses severe threats to health, and even death in some cases. However, the Americas region faces not only threats from foodborne illnesses, but is also experiencing increased threats from non-communicable diseases related to poor nutrition within the region. The World Health Organization calls obesity an “epidemic” in the Americas region, which has the highest prevalence of obesity out of all of its world regions.<sup>18</sup> At least 62% of adults in the Americas region suffer from being overweight or obese,<sup>18</sup> which can contribute to a substantial amount of future health issues. Therefore, policies within this subtheme must acknowledge both the immediate and long-term consequences of the foods consumed within the Americas, and address how those consequences can be mitigated for those living within the region.

To combat food-related illnesses worldwide, the World Health Organization has issued a variety of policy recommendations related to foodborne diseases and nutrition. It emphasizes the need to strengthen surveillance of foodborne diseases as they arise, with a focus on indicator-based and event-based surveillance.<sup>19</sup> To mitigate the contributions of food consumption to obesity, it suggests the consideration of policies that restrict the consumption of packaged foods that contain few micronutrients, as well as policies that reduce the intake of sugar-sweetened beverages.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, it has proposed public health campaigns that focus on educating populations about proper nutrition, and regulations on product commercialization to prevent deceptive advertising methods.<sup>21</sup> Utilizing approaches to address both foodborne illnesses and noncommunicable diseases that stem from food consumption, the World Health Organization aims to protect population health both in the present and in future decades.



# FOOD-RELATED ILLNESSES

Brazil has led the way in addressing food-related illnesses in the Americas region through its dietary guidelines, released in 2014 in response to the growing incidence of non-communicable diseases within the country.<sup>22</sup> These guidelines focus on using simple rules to encourage fresher and more nutritious food consumption, as opposed to delineating exact amounts of nutrients that should be consumed.<sup>22</sup> They emphasize the need to consume foods that have not been pre-prepared or “industrialized”, and recommend restaurants that serve fresh foods over fast food chains.<sup>22</sup> They provide examples of fruits and vegetables that have grown in Brazil for centuries, and encourage the consumption of these traditional foods as an investment in Brazilian culture as well as one’s health.<sup>23</sup> The guidelines also encourage consumers to think critically about any commercial advertisements of food products.<sup>22</sup> Finally, they promote the traditional cultural ideal that food is a tool for forming social relationships, and mealtimes should be shared with others.<sup>23</sup> While the long-term health effects of these guidelines are yet to be seen, Brazil’s natural products market grew 98% over the last five years, and healthy retail stores have increased dramatically.<sup>24</sup> Taking Brazil’s success into consideration, the AMRO region recommends that its delegates address multiple pathways for altering food consumption patterns when working towards a theme of reducing food related illnesses.

To address more immediate concerns, Canada has developed a detailed set of guidelines known as the Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol (FIORP), to “coordinate the actions of multiple agencies in response to foodborne illness outbreaks.”<sup>25</sup> The guidelines delineate the responsibilities of federal authorities, provincial governments, and local governments during a foodborne illness outbreak.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the guidelines outline policies for communications during a foodborne illness outbreak, including considering citizen information needs and building public trust.<sup>25</sup> These guidelines seemed to have created a strong foundation for food safety in Canada. For example in 2014, Canada received a top ranking in food safety out of seventeen of its peer countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>26</sup> While guidelines such as Canada’s can efficiently respond to foodborne illness outbreaks and prevent them from spreading, it is also important to consider the prevention of foodborne illness. The AMRO region encourages its delegates to develop a holistic approach when considering the food related illnesses theme, taking into account not only foodborne illnesses and non-communicable diseases related to food consumption, but also examining policy opportunities for prevention and response.

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