

## How industry funding affects global policy setting on sweetness and flavouring of formulas.

[Codex Nutrition Meeting \(CCNFSDU\) 19 – 25 November and 1 December 2021](#)

The debate on **Tuesday 23rd November** focused on the essential ingredients for Follow-up formulas from 6 months and Drinks for Young Children 12-36 months. The most controversial issues were flavourings and sweetness. Following almost unanimous opposition from Member States a sentence was added stating that **no flavourings will be permitted for follow-up formulas for older infants**. However, despite strong opposition from many countries, WHO, UNICEF and public interest NGOs, **fruit extracts and vanilla flavourings will be permitted for the baby drinks**.

The main countries pushing the flavourings were the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, along with industry front groups and the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), the only paediatric body called upon to advise Codex proceedings. ESPGHAN is 43% funded by industry and regularly supports industry positions at Codex, and in this debate argued that a prohibition of flavours would put the baby drinks at a disadvantage to 'less good' products that don't meet Codex standards. Many developing countries already regulate these products as breastmilk substitutes so they opposed any flavourings. The EU (representing 27 countries) also questioned the safety of fruit extracts as flavouring agents in that many contain additional compounds. The EU also said that they saw no technological need for them since children don't seek flavoured products. With no consensus reached, the prohibition was not adopted. However a compromise sentence was added: *National or regional authorities may restrict or prohibit the use of the listed flavourings*. IBFAN argued that flavourings promote products and mislead parents and carers – especially if packages are idealised with images of fresh fruits – essentially acting as a health claim. These products are highly processed, sweetened and displace breastfeeding, other fresh milks or healthier family foods, pose many risks for young children. Our call for no GM ingredients – supported by Ecuador – was not taken up.

**Carbohydrates (sweeteners)** The meeting on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November discussed the opinion of the Codex Committee of Methods of Analysis (CCMAS) that there are currently no validated methods to measure the sweetness of carbohydrate sources. This gave some of the countries and companies pushing the products – New Zealand, Australia, the US, the baby food industry (ISDI) and others – an opportunity to call for the deletion of a key sentence, saying it would be difficult to regulate: *“for products based on non-milk protein, carbohydrate sources that have no contribution to sweet taste should be preferred and in no case sweeter than lactose*. A number of countries and observers – Norway, Uruguay, Mexico, Brazil, the EU (representing 27 member countries), Chile, Switzerland, WHO, NHF, IBFAN and ENCA were keen to limit the level of sweetness in these products and supported the retention of the sentence.

While highlighting the obligation of all governments to reduce the 30% contribution of the food system to global Greenhouse Gas emissions, IBFAN made the point that if it is not possible to determine the sweetness of these products, surely they should not be promoted. We also raised the fact that the exporting countries have a serious conflict of interest and they should be placing child and planetary health above trade concerns.

Final text of the [Standard for Follow-up formula for older infants and product for Young children](#).

Text relating to carbohydrates 6) *Lactose should be the preferred carbohydrate in the product as defined in Section 2.1 based on milk protein. For products based on non-milk protein, carbohydrate sources that have no contribution to sweet taste should be preferred and in no case be sweeter than lactose.* 7) *Mono- and disaccharides, other than lactose, should not exceed 2.5 g/100kcal (0.60 g/100kJ). National and/or regional authorities may limit this level to 1.25 g/100 kcal (0.30 g/100 kJ). Sucrose and/or fructose should not be added.* 8) *For the product as defined in Section 2.1 with a protein level below 3.0 g/100 kcal a maximum level of available carbohydrates up to 14 g/100 kcal (3.3 g/100 kJ) may be permitted by competent national and/or regional authorities.*