

*International Tree Nut Council  
Nutrition Research & Education Foundation*

June 17, 2003

Dr. Derek Yach  
Executive Director  
Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health  
World Health Organization  
CH-1211 Geneva  
27-Switzerland

Dear Dr. Yach:

I would like to thank you for the invitation to attend the meeting at the World Health Organization headquarters in Geneva on June 17, 2003. While the International Tree Nut Council will be unable to send someone at this time, we remain committed to working with you to develop the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

On April 16, 2002, Sigrid Beer-Borst provided both oral and written comments on our behalf at the industry consultation meeting. She explained that the emphasis on low-fat diets is now under scrutiny in the United States as a more moderate approach has currently been taken for making dietary recommendations for fat intake. While lowering saturated fat to lower heart disease risk is well accepted, examining the amount and type of fat associated with healthy eating has become the focal point. A "moderate" dietary recommendation approach to total fat, emphasizing unsaturated fat and whole food choices is included in the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2000. The 2000 American Heart Association (AHA) Dietary Guidelines recommendation to "limit foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol; and substitute unsaturated fat from vegetables, fish, legumes, and nuts" includes nuts in a more predominant role than the past. In May 2001, the National Institutes of Health's National Cholesterol Education Program Report formalized its recommendation to keep total fat in the diet between 25-35% of calories. The recommendation for polyunsaturated fat in the diet is up to 10% of calories. It also recommended the consumption of monounsaturated fat up to 20% of calories. This is the first time monounsaturated fat has been officially "increased" as part of a recommended healthy eating plan. This has a major implication for all tree nuts, which contain significant amounts of unsaturated fatty acids.

In recent years, nutrition experts and Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust have begun to recommend a Mediterranean-like diet characterized by abundant plant foods (fruit, vegetables, breads, other forms of cereals, beans, nuts and seeds), fresh fruit, olive oil, dairy products (principally cheese and yogurt), fish and poultry consumed in low to moderate amounts, zero to four eggs consumed weekly, red meat consumed in low amounts, and wine consumed in low to moderate amounts, normally with meals. Dietary data from the Mediterranean region shows the lowest recorded rates of chronic diseases and the highest adult life expectancy. And, it has been shown that apparent benefits of the Mediterranean diet seem to be transferable to population groups from different origins and dietary habits. The Mediterranean diet as a secondary prevention measure has also been shown to be much less expensive compared to other diet or drug treatments.

Another trend taking hold in the United States is snacking. In fact, snacks are now making a significant contribution to the diet and nuts can play a role as a nutrient-dense, healthful option. According to *Consumer Reports on Health*, three out of four adults in the United States eat at least one snack every day with snacks accounting for up to 25 percent of total calories in a day eaten outside the recognized three square meals. (*Consumer Reports on Health*, November 2001). In addition, children in the United States are eating more snacks today than 20 years ago. According to a US government survey of 21,236 children and adolescents ages 2 to 18 who participated in the 1977-78 Nationwide Food Consumption Survey and the 1989-91 and 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals, the prevalence of snacking among children and adolescents increased 91 percent across all ages. Snacks contributed approximately 25 percent to children's and adolescents' energy intake, and snacks consumed by children and adolescents across all ages were more energy dense than meals. (Jahns L, Siega-Riz AM, Popkins BM. 2001. The increasing prevalence of snacking among U.S. children from 1977 to 1996. *The Journal of Pediatrics* 138(4):493-498.)

While snacking can add important nutrients to the diet, too many snacks and calories can contribute to obesity and increase the risk for diabetes. According to researchers studying 83,818 women from the Nurses' Health Study, "Our findings suggest potential benefits of higher nut and peanut butter consumption in lowering risk of type 2 diabetes in women. To avoid increasing caloric intake, regular nut consumption can be recommended as a replacement for consumption of refined grain products or red or processed meats." The amount of nuts used in this study—and in others—was one ounce. In order to help consumers better understand what an ounce of nuts looks like, we've developed the attached brochure, *Go Nuts Every Day*—emphasizing the need for portion control.

The majority of unsaturated fat and tree nut research-to-date has focused on heart disease prevention, but researchers are now beginning to investigate the potential impact of unsaturated fat and tree nut consumption on prevention of other chronic diseases including weight management, diabetes type II (as seen above), hypertension and cancer. For instance, AICR researchers in Lyon, France have looked at the effect of nut intake in the EPIC study and colorectal cancer risk: gender and site specific protective. Interestingly, the EPIC study has shown a significant protective effect of increased nut consumption for colon cancer in women.

While these research areas are emerging and deserve some attention, much more research is needed. An updated reference list for tree nut research is attached, as well as the most recent nutrition analysis for nuts. We were very pleased to see nuts listed in the "specific diet and physical activity recommendations" in the **solution** section of the consultation document. We firmly believe that nuts should play an important and integral role in a healthy diet and look forward to working with you in the future. We will be participating in the European Nutrition Congress in Fall 2003, where emerging tree nut research will be presented, and we expect to learn more about European health issues. If the International Tree Nut Council can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Doug Youngdahl  
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