

WHITWORTHS - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (FDO0065)

I am Philip Gowland, the Commercial Director at Whitworths, a distinguished supplier of dried fruit, nuts, and seeds since 1886. Additionally, I serve as a board director of the industry trade body NDFTA. At Whitworths, we have embarked on a new strategic direction, driven by our commitment to enhancing the nation's health.

Aligned with the government's National Food Strategy, we have conducted an exhaustive examination of the country's health landscape, focusing particularly on the detrimental effects of poor diets and the potential of nuts, seeds, and dried fruit in mitigating associated health risks.

In light of our industry expertise and in conjunction with a recently completed but unpublished independent paper titled 'NUTS, SEEDS & DRIED FRUITS: IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF THE NATION WITH NATURE'S NUTRIENT POWERHOUSES,' I am submitting evidence for your consideration.

State of the Nation:

The independent paper (available upon request) provides a comprehensive overview of the nation's health, reiterating concerns about the decline in healthy life expectancy and the increasing prevalence of chronic illnesses. Notably, it highlights:

- A decline in the years of healthy life expectancy. *Source: ONS Health and life expectancies. State of Ageing 2022*
- Widespread reliance on prescribed medications. 53% of the population reported that within the last fortnight, they had used medicines prescribed by their GP. *Source: ONS: UK Health Indicators 2019-2020, 29th March 2022*
- Projections of increased chronic illness burden by 2040, including skyrocketing rates of heart failure and diabetes. *Source: The Health Foundation, July 2023, Health in 2040*<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/health-in-2040>

Diet:

The paper delves into the detrimental impact of current dietary patterns on public health. It underscores that poor diet is now the leading

preventable cause of ill health and disease, necessitating urgent intervention. *Source: National Food Strategy, Independent Review, Henry Dimbleby.*

The paper covers key points of overconsumption of calories, salt, and free sugars (PAGE 38-51) leading to the drastic swing in obesity, depicted from the 1950's through to now (PAGE 20).

However, it is the papers focus on underconsumption that I would like to draw the committees attention to from this report.

Latest diet and nutrition studies show a stark underconsumption in almost all vitamins and minerals, particularly (PAGE 48):

- 84% of adults failing to get enough vitamin D, needed for healthy immune system and also associated with reduced cancer risk
- 72-80% of adults are failing to get enough vitamin E, critical in protecting the body from oxidative stress
- 24% of adults don't get enough potassium, important for a number of things including maintaining bloody pressure
- 80% not getting enough iron, essential for a number of factors including cardiovascular health

It goes on to highlight arguably the biggest concern in the nations diet, underconsumption of fibre which, as a result of ongoing reduced fibre levels, now requires over 50% increase in the average adult diet. (PAGE 45)

The paper highlights many of the health implications of underconsumption of fibre and the range of micronutrients discussed in the report. It is no coincidence that the resulting evidence shows that these levels of underconsumption can lead to enhanced national disease burden with the following being some of the biggest concerns.

- Heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancer
- Poor immunity
- Impacted muscular skeletal development
- Cellular inflammation
- Energy levels

The diseases in question are exactly the areas that enhanced obesity is also driving.

It is due to this fact I would like to urge the committee to focus as much on the subject of 'more' as they will do on the subject of 'less'.

What this means is to have the greatest impact on the nations disease burden we should be addressing areas where consumption needs to drastically increase as well as the areas where consumption needs to drastically reduce.

HFSS:

High Fat, Sugar, and Salt (HFSS) regulations aim to tackle overconsumption, but implementation challenges persist. Examples highlight unintended consequences such as penalization of nutrient-rich products (review seeds in the nutrient profiling model for instance) and shifts in consumer behavior towards less healthy alternatives as retail strategies aimed to protect valuable sales from impacted categories.

The result of this was clear, with 'impulse' categories seeing excellent yoy growth in the first 12 months and the HFSS snacking categories seeing the highest growth across all snacking definitions. 'Healthier' snacking categories on the other hand saw consumption reduction due to the space changes. *Source: Kantar Worldpanel, 52 w/e Oct 2023*

Fruit and Vegetables:

The guidance from WHO over 20 years ago encouraged adult individuals to consume 400g of fruit and vegetables every day. Our excellent public health campaign off the back of this introduced 5-a-day.

The original guidance was directly attributable to many of the conditions mentioned above: heart disease and cancers most critically.

What we have witnessed since the introduction of this initiative is unparalleled awareness and understanding of a health initiative, but a failure to get the average above 3 out of the recommended 5 portions. Closing this gap clearly addresses many of the nutrient gaps the report discusses particularly fibre, vitamins and minerals.

But with consumers citing a desire to increase their number, barriers such as volume per portion, shelf life, taste and ease of incorporating in to daily routines continue to prevent adequate consumption.

Nuts, Seeds, and Dried Fruit:

Contained in this report is a detailed breakdown of the composition of nuts, seeds and dried fruit (PAGE 57) with a fascinating comparison of nutrient profile between vegetables and nuts demonstrating how incredibly nutrient dense these products are with some highlights including (PAGE 61):

- 4 x the level of magnesium
- 8 x the level of zinc
- 30 x the level of copper
- 5 x the level of vitamin B1, 2 and 3
- 40 x the level of biotin
- 12 x the level of vitamin E
- 2 x the level of fibre

It is this nutrient density comparable with seeds and dried fruit that makes the required portion to deliver similar levels of nutrition significantly lower. Around 25-30g vs the current 80g portion required by fruit and vegetables.

Instantly, this provides an opportunity to explore how incorporating more nuts, seeds and dried fruit can provide a more convenient route to delivering enhanced levels of fibre, vitamins and minerals – and contribute towards a reduction of overall disease burden.

This sentiment is echoed by the Global Burden of Disease Study that identified that low consumption of nuts and seeds as a significant contributor to global deaths and the overall disease burden. (*Source: Global Burden of Disease Study: Lancet 2020; 396(10258): 1223–49.*)

Supplementing the 5-a-day:

Proposing a revamped '5-a-day' campaign to include nuts, seeds, and dried fruit could stimulate consumption and enhance nutrient intake. Incorporating these products into daily routines presents an accessible strategy to promote healthier dietary habits.

In conclusion, the evidence presented underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address dietary imbalances and combat obesity. Leveraging the nutritional benefits of nuts, seeds, and dried fruit offers a promising avenue for improving public health outcomes.

Thank you for considering this evidence as part of your inquiry. I trust it will inform robust policy interventions aimed at fostering healthier dietary habits and reducing the burden of diet-related diseases.

7 April 2024