

P-235 Review of *Food Type* Dietary Supplements
Initial Assessment Report
Submission from SIGNAL July 2002

The regulation of food has the potential to influence the food produced, available for sale and ultimately consumed. This has obvious consequences for public health nutrition. SIGNAL therefore welcomes FSANZ's initiative in conducting a consultation process through SIGNAL and trusts any issues raised during the consultation and not reiterated here are also given due consideration.

Terminology

The term '*food-type dietary supplements*' would imply that the food has health giving properties when the reverse may be true. Using this terminology has the potential to increase a public perception that these food groups may be of benefit. Some can be grouped under novel foods, however most new products escape that regulation, and there is no international definition of functional foods, therefore an alternative description would be helpful.

Potential impact of Food-Type Dietary Supplements on Health

From a public health nutrition perspective, a food supply which reflects the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) Australian Dietary Guideline series and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* would be one best suited to protect public health and safety. As such, one questions what role, if any, *food-type dietary supplements* (FTDS) play.

At best we suspect the impact of FTDS would be minimal and at worst misleading, so consumers are lured into thinking that consuming '*food-type dietary supplements*' was good for their health and a wise way to spend their limited food dollar. This is clearly inconsistent with national public health nutrition recommendations such as the NHMRC *Australian Dietary Guideline* series and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*. However, we know that manufacturers are currently producing these products and therefore regulatory processes are required.

This raises the issue of the blurred boundary between foods and therapeutics and the impact of marketing these products to the Australian public. Items such as therapeutic goods, medicines, complimentary medicines, dietary supplements and foods all seem to be regulated by different Acts however confusion may result regarding which Act and standard various products should be considered under. The definitions of these categories need to be clear and unambiguous for industry in addition to providing a public health advantage.

Vertical verses horizontal approach

Given that FTDS are unlikely to contribute anything of worth to the food supply from a public health perspective we would recommend a vertical approach to standards be pursued so as not to weaken the existing standards on general food which might otherwise occur if a horizontal approach was undertaken. For example, the vitamins and minerals standard as it pertains to general food could be weakened if a horizontal approach was adopted. A vertical approach to develop a new standard is recommended.

Considerations under a vertical standard for FTDS

Nutritive substances

A standard for FTDS should include regulation of issues such as vitamins and minerals (nutritive substances) taking into account the revised NHMRC Recommended Dietary Intakes (RDIs - anticipated completion in 2004). A percentage of the RDI upper safe limit should be applied so that no serve size of a product could exceed a specified conservative percentage of the upper safe limit.

SIGNAL would support limiting both the level and number of selected nutrients (defined as nutritive substances) which could be added to general and special purpose foods and also supports FSANZ current policy provisions established to:

- Control risks to health;
- Preserve the nutritional integrity of the food supply; and
- Support food-based nutrition education activities.

Labelling of FTDS

Labelling of FTDS is an issue which requires careful consideration. Labelling of FTDS with added vitamins and/or minerals should include in the Nutrition Information Panel useful info about products for consumers such as:

- the percentage of RDIs of all added vitamins and minerals included,
- consumption limit warnings such as the following warning statement suggestion – ‘this food is a *Food-type dietary supplement* (or alternative name) and should not replace a healthy balanced diet’, and
- prohibition of health claims labelling is recommended to minimise public health implications with the added factor that these products could be less attractive for industry to produce if health claims were not permissible.

Food-type dietary supplements have little to offer the Australian public with regard to contributing to a nutritious diet and should be regulated in such a way that the food supply continues to be safe and affordable.