

Hidden Hunger

Addressing society's most complex issues requires a systems-based approach that maximizes partnerships and innovation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a framework for tackling these challenges by fostering cross-sector collaboration and guiding policy decisions. The dairy sector is helping catalyze progress towards achieving the SDGs, improving quality of life, reducing global disparities, and ensuring a sustainable future for all.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



The Situation

- Hidden hunger, the presence of multiple micronutrient deficiencies despite an abundance of food, affects an estimated 2 billion people worldwide.¹ In high-income countries, these gaps are often accompanied by overnutrition (i.e., overweight and obesity), increasing healthcare costs, compromising health outcomes, and limiting human potential on a global scale.
- Micronutrient deficiency during critical periods of the life course can have severe and lasting consequences, including adverse pregnancy outcomes, impaired growth and development, and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases.²
- Current recommendations for sustainable eating may exacerbate micronutrient deficiencies. The often cited 2019 EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet recommendations could cause inadequate intakes of vitamin B12, calcium, iodine, iron, and zinc, among other things.³

The Path Forward

Hidden hunger and micronutrient deficiencies are often the result of diets that do not meet the nutritional needs of the population, particularly among vulnerable populations, such as older adults, children, and pregnant women. Balanced diets that contain animal sourced foods (ASF), such as dairy, have unique properties that can contribute to healthy sustainable food systems in important ways. By prioritizing access and availability of these diets, the dairy sector can help address the multiple burdens of malnutrition and promote good health and wellbeing for all.



How Dairy Can Help

- **Closes nutrient gaps:** The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognizes dairy foods as important contributors of bioavailable vitamins and minerals, including the critical shortfall nutrients calcium and B12.² These nutrients support growth, development, and health, particularly in vulnerable populations experiencing hidden hunger.^{4,5,6}
- **Provides high-quality protein:** Studies show dairy is a highly bioavailable, high-quality protein and calcium that can help enhance the bioavailability of other critical nutrients people need.⁷ Access to higher-quality protein sources ensures the most nutritional value for intake, which is critical for vulnerable populations for whom low protein and energy intake can promote a damaging cycle of events.^{4,5}
- **Enhances affordable nutrition:** Dairy accounts for a significant portion of nutrient requirements at a lower cost. For example, dairy provides more than half of daily calcium requirements, and when compared to other food categories, is the least expensive dietary source of these nutrients.⁸ Meeting daily nutrition needs with a plants-only diet would cost two times as much and significantly increase caloric intake compared to one that includes ASF.^{9,10}



Partnering with Dairy

- **Promote cooperative efforts to support inclusion of nutrient-rich dairy in food-based dietary guidance:** Animal sourced foods (ASF), such as dairy and eggs, are vital for combating hidden hunger by providing affordable and accessible essential nutrients to vulnerable populations. Because of its unique nutrient package and high-quality protein, dairy should be maintained as its own food group in dietary guidelines at 2-3 servings to satisfy global nutrition needs.
- **Support global nutrition education:** More than half of consumers in high-income countries do not consider nutrition when seeking out sustainable ways of eating.^{11,12} Nutrition education efforts targeting consumers, educators, health professionals, and policy makers can improve understanding of nutrition's role in healthy sustainable diets.



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Impact Story

Dairy's Role in Global Food-Based Dietary Guidelines

OVERVIEW

In recent updates to Dietary Guidelines in several developed nations where there is an abundance of food, scientific experts are recommending maintaining or increasing dairy consumption because they recognize it is vital to nutrient adequacy.

KEY FINDINGS

- The 2025 U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee explored reducing or removing dairy from dietary guidance, but found several nutrient gaps tied to these actions, including gaps for calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin, vitamin A, and zinc. The Committee maintained the advice to consume three dairy servings per day.¹³
- In 2024, Switzerland introduced a new dairy-specific food group, separate from its protein food group, recommending 2-3 servings per day because dairy products provide essential nutrients like calcium and protein.¹⁴
- The Nordic Nutrition Guidelines 2023 recommended increasing daily dairy consumption from 2 servings to 2.5 servings per day “to meet nutrient requirements,” including high-quality protein and vitamin D (in fortified products).¹⁵ The dairy recommendations from the Nordic Nutrition Guidelines have been adopted by countries such as Norway and Denmark.