



BRIEFING PAPER: CHANGING THE FOOD OF BRITAIN

This Briefing Paper summarises the report *Nutrient Profiling: Changing the food of Britain*, published in March 2015 by the Coronary Prevention Group in collaboration with the World Obesity Federation.

The benefits that can be gained from improving dietary health in Britain, in terms of reduced premature deaths and reduced ill health, have been calculated for the government agency Ofcom¹ and are shown here.

Estimated health benefits from population dietary improvements

	Deaths avoided each year	Quality adjusted life years gained
Fruit & vegetable intake increased to 5 a day	42,200	411,000
Daily salt intake reduced from average 9g to 6g	20,200	170,000
Saturated fat intake reduced by 2.3% of energy	3,500	33,000
Added sugar intake reduced by 1.75% of energy	3,500	49,000
Total	69,400	663,000

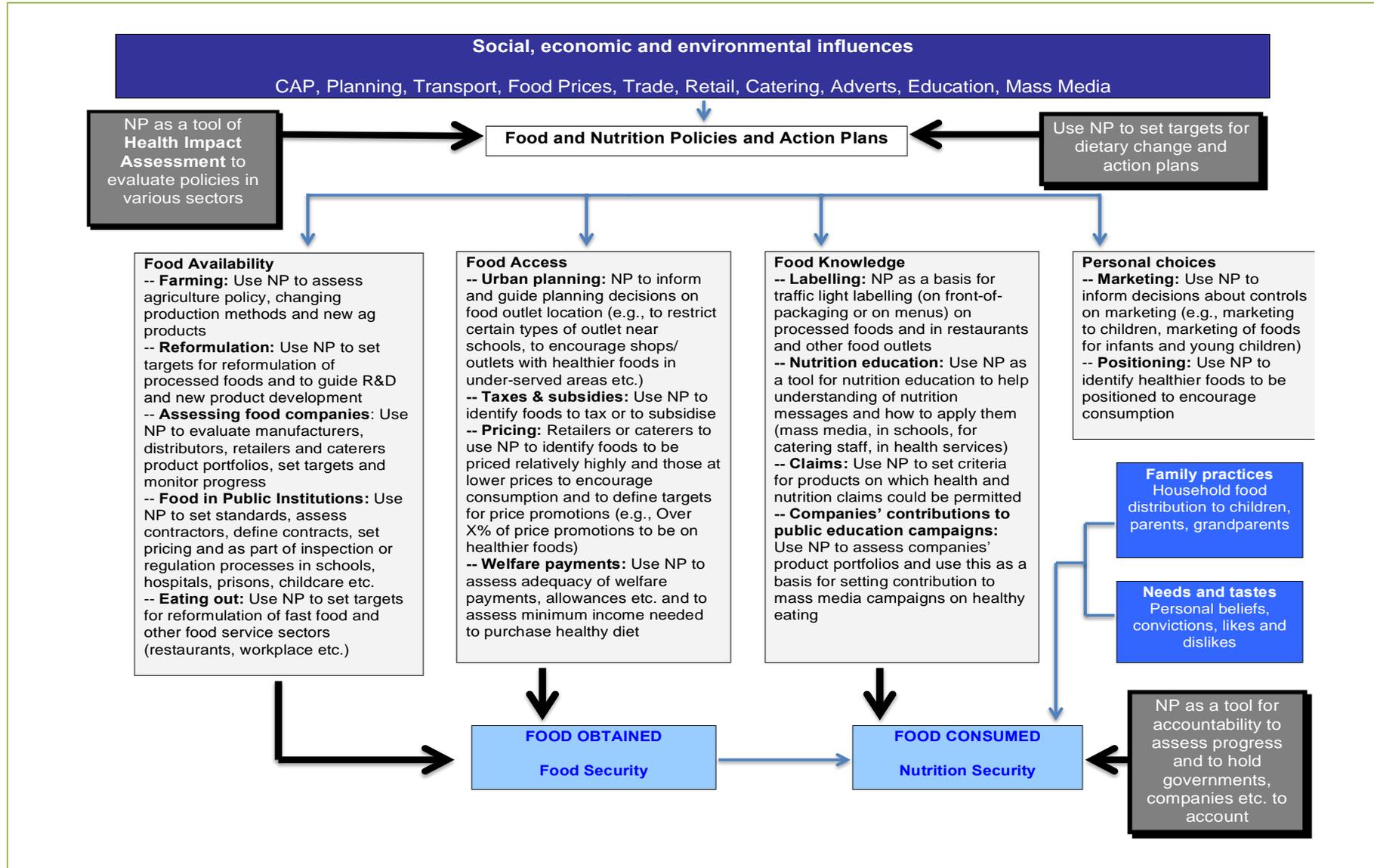
However, the large majority of adults in Britain are failing to meet the five principle dietary guidelines promoted by the UK government since the early 1990s (for total fat, saturated fats, salt, sugar, and fruit and vegetables). The aim of this paper is to assess the opportunities for influencing UK food supplies in order to improve nutrition security, focussing on the use of nutrient profiling schemes to categorise food products, and the application of nutrient profiling to food policy implementation. Nutrient profiling (NP) is a method for evaluating specific individual foods for their contribution to the achievement of population dietary targets. It takes as a starting point the set of food-based dietary guidelines developed by national authorities for promoting public health, and provide a formula by which any given food product can be evaluated for its contribution towards achieving, or undermining, adherence to the dietary guidelines.

Examples of current nutrient profiling schemes and their application

Scheme	Application	Authority
Definitions of 'high', 'low', 'lower' etc., levels of nutrients in processed foods	Claims on food product labels	EU Directive
Thresholds for high, medium and low levels of specified nutrients: fat, saturated fat, salt, sugar	'Traffic-light' labelling	Department of Health
Composite figure based on levels for seven components	TV advertising to children	Ofcom

While some specific applications are in use (see above), there is great scope for further, and more powerful, applications of NP to affect food consumption patterns and resulting health. This paper discusses how NP could be used in every sector of the food system, from farm and factories through to schools and supermarkets shown diagrammatically overleaf.

¹ Ofcom (2006) *Annexe 7- Impact Assessment Consultation on Television Advertising of Food and Drink to Children*. (Cited in: Cabinet Office (2008) *Food: an analysis of the issues* London: The Strategy Unit.) Joint FSA/DoH analysis extrapolated for the Strategy Unit. Benefits of the 5-a-day based on 136g increment in consumption – the gap between estimated intake (Health Survey for England baseline) and target based on standard portion size.





Applying nutrient profiling to a wider range of policies

A clear example of the need for applying NP to government policies in other departments can be shown by considering publicly-funded research (BBSRC, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council), publicly-funded rural development (RDPE, the Rural Development Programme for England) and publicly-funded technical assistance to businesses (TSB, the Technology Strategy Board). The table below shows a few examples from funding grants given in the last five years to assist small, medium and in some cases large companies – including Nestlé (Nestec), Mondelez (formerly Kraft-Cadbury) and PepsiCo. While many grants may be for laudable purposes, the ones shown below raise questions about their impact on availability and price of foods which undermine dietary advice.

Examples of public funding of food-related projects

Project	From	Date	Amount £
Conversion of a barn into an ice cream shop	RDPE (31/5/11)	2011	31,783
Expansion of a biscuit production unit	RDPE (31/12/10)	2010	12,500
Conversion of a barn into a chocolate production unit	RDPE (30/09/10)	2010	11,400
Co-project with Mondelez for confectionery production	TSB 101542	2013-15	637,812
Co-project with Mondelez for reduced input instant coffee	TSB 101390	2013-16	426,660
Development of functional ingredients for snacks	TSB 750691	2013-14	5,000
Improvement of crisps frying stability	TSB 508816	2013-15	84,128
Market research for new biscuits	TSB 750819	2013-14	5,000
Co-project with Nestec for chocolate cooling technology	TSB 101394	2013-15	487,268
3-D chocolate printing for personalised gifts	TSB 131123	2013	24,750
Development of new food colouring additives	TSB 131301	2013	24,155
Co-project with PepsiCo for dehydrated snack production	TSB 101384	2013-16	356,076
Development of synthesised fruit flavouring additives	BBSRC L024381	2014-15	102,772
Improving the sensory properties of confectionery wafers	BBSRC K501517	2012-16	100,173
Re-engineering confectionery wafer manufacture	BBSRC K501530	2012-16	92,173
Freshness control of wafer-based confectionery	BBSRC M503058	2014-18	94,126



Opportunities to ensure ‘health in all policies’

The report published with this *Briefing Paper* describes some 200 opportunities for using NP to assess government policies. A few examples are shown here:

Examples of opportunities for using nutrient profiling

Reformulation – use NP to set mandatory or voluntary targets for reformulating products; Use NP as a tool to inform companies’ decisions on new product development and reviewing existing products; Use NP to assess a company’s overall product portfolio, and to set targets for change.

Replacing trans fats – Use NP to assess the health profile of products where trans fats have been removed, and to monitor the situation.

Complementary foods – Use an appropriate nutrient profile model to assess foods marketed as suitable for infants and young children.

Product portfolios – Companies can use NP to set targets for product portfolios and new product development

Company investment – Investment banks can use NP to assess company portfolios for risk.

Government support for food technology research - Use NP to set criteria for public funding for food technology research.

New products – Companies can use NP to report their efforts to improve the health profile of new product launches.

Retailer product promotions – Use NP to identify foods for promotion.

Fast food catering – Use NP to evaluate the product portfolio of fast food outlets.

Planning consent – Use NP assessments as criteria for licensing new catering premises.

Food in public institutions – Use NP to monitor/control the nutritional content of foods sold or served in public institutions.

Inspection/Regulation – Use NP as part of the assessment of good nutritional practice as part of regulatory inspections.

Healthy eating awards – Use NP to define healthy products that qualify for awards, or to assess caterers’ provision of healthy/unhealthy foods.

Childcare – Use NP to identify products which are suitable to be brought into childcare facilities.

Guidance for governors and staff – Integrate NP into guidance to help define and describe foods and assess companies.

Community meals – Use NP to assess meals, evaluate tendering companies and guide procurement process.

Public procurement – Use NP in procurement contracts, assessing companies tendering for contracts.

Taxes/Subsidies – Use NP to identify foods to be taxed/levied or those which qualify for subsidies.

Re-aligning VAT – Use NP to assess food and ingredients which attract standard VAT and which are zero-rated or exempt.

Sponsorship – Use NP to identify which companies from which it is appropriate for community organisations, clubs, churches, workplaces, sports events etc. to accept sponsorship.

Limiting commercial interests – Use NP to identify companies to be excluded from policy formulation process.

Research and education funding – Use NP to identify companies’ from which research or educational funding should not be accepted.

Welfare – Use NP to assess the adequacy of benefit payments and allowances; Use NP to define foods which qualify for subsidised or free distribution; Use NP to assess foods provided at home through welfare support schemes.

Defining sustainable subsidies – Use NP to define products suitable for public funding for improving their ecological footprints.



Moving forward

Since 2010, the policy agenda for nutrition in the UK has been dominated largely by an approach promoted by Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health 2010-2012. The ‘Public Health Responsibility Deal’ is based on committees of business, NGO and public health representatives tasked with developing targets for voluntary action in four topic areas: health at work, alcohol, physical activity and food.

Lansley stated his belief that the voluntary approach adopted by the Responsibility Deal would be faster and cheaper than regulation, and some progress has been made, for instance with the introduction of smaller portion size options for soft drinks and confectionery. However, public-private partnerships need clear monitoring and evaluation,² with specific areas of action, independent standards-setting, measurable outcomes and robust sanctions.³ Civil society organisations have been cautious to offer support to the Responsibility Deal, especially around proposals regarding alcohol consumption, with most preferring to call for regulatory measures.^{4 5}

Further government initiatives in this area are unlikely before the 2015 general election, and there is a pressing need to prepare stronger policy initiatives. The UK government is a signatory to the European health policy framework Health 2020 which takes as one of its strategic objectives the strengthening of health governance through greater responsibility and accountability by all stakeholders, and has a priority of public health action “underpinned by actions on equity, social determinants of health, empowerment and supportive environments”.⁶

The UK is also a signatory to the World Health Organization’s Vienna Declaration of July 2013⁷ which urges member states to consider ‘*the use of economic tools and incentives to promote healthy eating*’ and to take ‘*decisive action to reduce food marketing pressure to children with regard to foods high in energy, saturated fats, trans fatty acids, free sugars or salt and implement common approaches to promote product reformulation, consumer friendly labelling and nutrient profiling tools which facilitate a healthy choice*’.

Meanwhile, nutrient profiling is gaining attention in other European member states. Several countries have introduced voluntary or co-regulatory measures for restricting promotional marketing of foods to children (including Denmark, Norway and Ireland). Furthermore, nutrient profiling has been accepted as a policy tool by the European Commission in their regulation of health and nutrition claims. While early

² Petticrew M et al (2013). The Public Health Responsibility Deal: how should such a complex public health policy be evaluated? *J Public Health (Oxf)* 35:495-501.

³ Panjwani C, Caraher M (2013). The Public Health Responsibility Deal: Brokering a deal for public health, but on whose terms? *Health Policy* Nov 17. [Epub ahead of print].

⁴ Trigg N (2011). Health groups reject ‘responsibility deal’ on alcohol. *BBC News Online* 14/3/2011. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-12728629> (accessed 7 January 2014)

⁵ Limb M (2013). Public health body quits responsibility deal over government’s failure to act on tobacco and alcohol. *BMJ* 347:f4590.

⁶ WHO European Regional Office (2012). *Health 2020 A European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century* http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/199532/Health2020-Long.pdf?ua=1

⁷ WHO European Regional Office (2013). *Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020* <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2013/07/vienna-conference-on-nutrition-and-noncommunicable-diseases>



proposals for a scheme to define those foods which would be permitted to carry such claims could not be agreed,⁸ further proposals are expected following the appointment, late last year, of a new Commission.

Perhaps most significantly, nutrient profiling has also been accepted by the food industry as a tool for controlling marketing messages to children. Following many years of food industry representatives asserting that there was ‘no such thing as an unhealthy food, only an unhealthy diet’, a number of companies signed the *EU Pledge* which offers voluntary limits to advertising to children of foods specified by each company or, more recently, specified in a collective set of criteria applicable to all signatory companies from the end of 2014.⁹

Recommendations to government

- 1. Support the World Health Organization efforts to promote nutrient profiling in a range of applications, but in particular on the protection of children from marketing in traditional media, in digital media and on product packaging.**
- 2. Call on the European Commission to set a timetable for developing a nutrient profiling model for the purpose of regulating health and nutrition claims on foods.**
- 3. Ensure that school food guidelines are consistent with nutrient profiling models used to restrict TV advertising to children. No government should subsidise or promote the sales of food products which are conducive to ill-health.**
- 4. Use nutrient profiling to review the application of VAT to foodstuffs to ensure consistency with healthy eating recommendations.**
- 5. Require all catered food to display interpretative nutrition labelling such as the ‘traffic light’ or a similar nutrient profiling scheme.**
- 6. Develop nutrient profiling methods to categorise fast food outlets, in order to apply planning controls for outlets, especially within, for example, 1 km of a school.**

⁸ Watson E (2011) EC dithers over nutrient profiles as timetable slips two years.

<http://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Regulation/EC-dithers-over-nutrient-profiles-as-timetable-slips-two-years>

⁹ EU Pledge (2012) Nutrition Criteria White Paper. http://www.eu-pledge.eu/sites/eu-pledge.eu/files/releases/EU_Pledge_Nutrition_White_Paper_Nov_2012.pdf