

## Book Review

Robertson A, Tirado C, Lobstein T, Jermini M, Knai C, Jensen JH, Ferro-Luzzi A, James WPT, eds. *Food and Health in Europe: A New Basis for Action*. WHO Regional Publications, European Series, No. 96. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 2004. US\$90, paperback, xvi + 388 pp. ISBN 92 890 1363 X

This publication fulfils one of the WHO (World Health Organization) European Region's planned actions set forth in its First Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy (<http://www.euro.who.int/Document/E72199.pdf>) in 2000: to publish a book setting out the scientific basis for a food and nutrition policy.

The book presents in figures the current situation in the three pillars (strategies) of a comprehensive food and nutrition policy as stated in the First Action Plan: strategies on nutrition, food safety and sustainable food supply (food security). All are based upon the principles of HEALTH21 (Health for All policy framework for the WHO European Region, 1998) and Agenda 21 (UN Conference on Environment and Development, 1992).

The suggested comprehensive food and nutrition policy highlights the need for a food safety strategy to prevent contamination of chemical and biological type; a nutrition strategy to ensure optimal health for all irrespective of socio-economic status or age; and a sustainable food supply strategy to ensure enough food of good quality for all while stimulating rural economies. As the food supply influences both the safety and the composition of food, the policy calls for concerted action to secure safe and affordable food for all.

This publication is aimed at health professionals, and it may be of great value for teachers in health sciences, public health or public health nutrition. Internet accessibility ([www.euro.who.int](http://www.euro.who.int)) makes it a useful tool in highlighting the problems related to nutrition, physical activity, food safety and food security, offering easy access to sources of information on these topics. For policy-making and advocacy, the publication serves as a good reminder of important facts and as a handy booklet (summary also accessible online) for politicians when important decisions about health and nutrition are made at the national level.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first describes the link between diet and disease, highlighting

the major nutrition- and food-related health problems and their costs in Europe. The second chapter describes the problems related to food safety and suggests ways to secure the provision of safe food in Europe through concerted action from farm to fork. The third chapter moves on to discuss the issues of food security and sustainability of food production. Current knowledge on the uneven distribution of wealth in the global economy and its consequences are highlighted well while acknowledging the fact that healthy diets cannot be achieved through health education efforts alone, but are influenced by what is available and what is affordable. The need to aim for sustainable production of food is emphasised throughout the text as a means to offer safe and high-quality food with equal access to all.

The fourth chapter presents the main topic of the book and has been given the most space. Ways to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate food and nutrition policy and strategies are discussed in detail, considering appropriate approaches for different age groups and life stages. Strategies for effective food and nutrition initiatives are presented as examples.

The fifth chapter concludes with ways in which government policy built around public health can make changes in the composition and availability of the national food supply and thus positively affect the environment so that public health can flourish. The authors conclude that major improvements in public health have been achieved through social change and a broad-based strategy. Achieving this in food policy will require coherent and consistent action to which this book hopes to offer help, and it does so in a well laid-out, comprehensive and supportive manner. The book will be useful for many of us.

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