



## Australian Nut Industry Council and Nuts for Life submission to Preventative Health Taskforce

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2008

This submission was authorised by Chris Joyce, Nuts for Life Chair and Australian Nut Industry Council Director. References and supportive information is being emailed separately.

ANIC represents the Australian tree nut growing industries (almonds, chestnuts, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, pistachios and walnuts) and supports Nuts for Life. Nuts for Life is a generic health promotion initiative voluntarily funded by the Australian Tree Nut Industry (growers, processors, packers and importers of tree nuts) to provide nutrition and health information on nuts to health professionals, media and consumers. Australian Government matched funds are also received through Horticulture Australia.

We applaud the Australian Government for developing a Preventative Health Taskforce to provide evidence-based advice on strategies to prevent obesity, and offer the following comments on the potential initiatives from the obesity technical paper.

### 4.1 Reshaping food supply towards lower risk products

- Nuts are an essential food that must be included in a healthy diet. Although nuts are high in fat (*total fat range 50-75g per 100g of nuts*) and contain saturated fat (*range 3-15g per 100g*) (1) regular nut consumption lowers heart disease risk by 30-50% (2-5) and helps lower blood cholesterol by 3-20% (6). Heart healthy nutrients in nuts include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, fibre, arginine, plant sterols, folate, vitamin E, copper, magnesium, selenium and zinc.(1) These nutrients together with other antioxidants such as polyphenols may work synergistically to reduce heart disease risk.(6)
- Those who are overweight and obese have a higher risk of heart disease.(7)
- Epidemiological evidence also suggests people who eat nuts at least five times a week do not weigh more than people who consume nuts less than once a week. Evidence indicates a trend towards frequent nut consumers having a lower BMI than non-consumers and eating nuts regularly may reduce the risk of weight gain. (2-5,8) Nuts are high in fibre, which may trap some of the fat in nuts excreting it from the body.(9-12) Fibre also fills the stomach. The high protein and fat content helps curb the appetite (13) through the release of gut hormones together causing satiation. (14,15)
- Tax disincentives for all high energy dense/ high fat foods such as nuts will disadvantage Australians by giving the impression that nuts are not healthy and as a result risk higher rates of heart disease, weight gain and poorer diets.
- Criteria to determine which foods are “healthy” will need to be set. FSANZ’s P293 Draft Nutrient Profile Calculator has been developed to determine which foods are eligible for health claims.(16) All raw nuts pass this calculator. Food category specific criteria such as NHF Pick the Tick program may also be appropriate.

### 4.2 Food composition

- The total fat and saturated fat levels in high fat, whole foods such as nuts, seeds, avocado and olives can not be manipulated. Regulating levels of total fat and saturated fat in whole foods is counterproductive to the positive role these natural foods play in a healthy diet.
- Nuts are also trans fat free.

### 4.5.2 Food labelling

- Front of pack labelling systems such as the Percent Daily Intake (%DI) based on an adult male's energy intake (8700kJ/day) or Traffic Light Systems will disadvantage nuts. They are simplistic and highlight the energy content without explaining the vital role that a small handful of nuts daily, plays in human nutrition and weight management.

#### 4.7.2 Educating health professionals

- Since 2003 Nuts for Life has undertaken regular market research of health professionals to measure success. The number of GPs for instance that think nuts are important for prevention of heart disease has risen from 63% in 2003 to 93% in 2008 and those that believe nuts have a positive effect on weight management from 18% in 2006 to 56% in 2008. Nuts for Life plans to continue educating GPs along with medical students, dietitians and fitness leaders.(17)

#### References

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