

Flour millers join to **FIGHT** MALNUTRITION

Flour fortification with micronutrients is a simple way to make a big health gain say the experts. But the message has not got through to many governments. The Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI), which called a meeting in London recently, aims to change that.

Consultant Peter Adamson, who has prepared 80 national vitamin and mineral deficiency reports on behalf of the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), felt there is a huge communications job to be done. "I've never known an issue where the gap is so wide

between the importance of the issue and its public profile," he said.

Jamie Greenheck, vice president of Fleishman Hillard, the public relations company FFI is using, felt that case is a strong one. "There is so much data to support this that it becomes a no brainer," she said.

Flour fortification has the support of UNICEF, which has undertaken vitamin and mineral deficiency damage assessments on a country by country basis.

"There has been some remarkable and encouraging progress," said its director of programs, Joe Judd. Only about 20% of wheat flour is fortified with iron and/or folic acid. Flour is fortified in 63 countries. "We need urgent action in another 30 countries," he said. "We see fortification as one of the most important tools possible for the achievement of the UN's development goals.

A SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND CHEAP SOLUTION

"The problem is that those of us involved in this industry actually take nutrients out when we strip the bran from the grain to make flour," said Andrew Lindberg, managing director of the Australian Wheat Board.

There is nothing new in concern over nutrient deficiencies, he noted. "It's a problem that's been recognized for over

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— **William Dietz**, U.S. Center for Disease Control

60 years," he said. Flour fortification is a very simple answer. "It's safe, effective and cheap," he said.

William Dietz, director of the U.S. Center for Disease Control's Nutrition and Physical Activity Division, was even more vehement. "There's no more important step in national development than addressing micronutrient deficiency, and the critical factor there is flour fortification," he said.

For example, Dietz said Pellagra from niacin deficiency was widespread in the southwestern United States before World War II. The introduction of niacin fortification in flour triggered a sharp fall in cases. "This is a disease in the U.S. that we rarely see today," he said.

Folic acid is linked with Spina Bifida. "Most women are not taking folic acid because they don't know they're pregnant," he said. Spina Bifida affects around 250,000 children a year worldwide. Flour fortified with folic acid in the U.S., which was made optional in 1997 and mandatory in 1999, has achieved a 30% fall in the incidence of neural tube defects.

Iron deficiency impairs the ability of children to learn. "This has a major impact on their IQ," Dietz said. On a wider economic level it impairs the productiv-



Andrew Lindberg, managing director of AWB, encouraged the industry — rather than government — to be the driving force to implement and find cost solutions for mandatory flour fortification in countries around the world.

by Chris Lyddon

Millers, public health and disability groups and government agencies met in London recently to see how flour fortification benefits millions



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GAIN's executive director, Rolf Carriere, noted his organization has millions set aside for flour fortification funding, hoping to reach 40 countries by 2007.

located U.S.\$30 million for 11 projects, nine of which include flour fortification. "By 2007 we will reach at least 40 countries," he said. But it will take international cooperation. "No single agency alone can do this," he said. "If in your country there is no national fortification alliance, please create one."

Although the cost is low, it still needs to be addressed, said Venkatesh Manmar, president of the Micronutrient Initiative. "How can we insert \$1 of nutrient into the fluctuating grain price in such a way that it can be absorbed? he asked.

INDUSTRY INITIATIVE

One milling company that has introduced flour fortification in the last year is Turkey's Doruk (Doruk Una Deger Katma Gida San. Ve Tic A.S.). Board Member Hakan Esen described how his company had communicated directly with consumers, in cooperation with the

ity of workers. It affects around 50% of children worldwide, with around 10% affected in the U.S.

Iron fortification takes 60 grams of premix for a tonne. He put the cost of

premix at \$8.75 a kilogram or not much more than 50 cents a tonne.

Rolf Carriere, Executive Director of Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, said that his organization has so far al-

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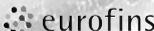
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— **Andrew Lindberg, AWB**

bakeries. "We had to differentiate the product," he said.

Now the Turkish government has established a committee on flour fortification and invited Doruk to take part. "We are hoping that fortification will become mandatory within a couple of months," he said.

Doruk has financed some of the government's own research and development program on fortification.

AWB's Andrew Lindberg pointed out that where the industry had taken the initiative, the issue of cost tended to get resolved. "The cost is significant and can become a point of difficulty in the market," he said. The answer was for the supply chain to work out where the cost was to be carried. "We have found commercially sensible ways of sharing the cost," he said.

Lindberg also suggested that governments could divert the money from less useful activities in food and agriculture.

Indian miller Vinod Kapoor, chief executive of Kapoor Brothers Roller Flour Mills in India, felt that cost would make little real difference.

"Cost is not a factor that will determine the industry not to fortify," he said. "It is the mindset that needs to change." And the mindset of officials needs to change most, he noted.

GOVERNMENTS WON'T PAY

Jose Luis Fuente, the President of the Latin American millers organization, ALIM, did not expect that change to go as far as providing money. "If we think that the government is going to pay, it's a fallacy," he said. "At the end it's the consumer who will bear the cost." The industry has to persuade consumers that flour fortification is a worthwhile measure.

The milling industry and the grain sector as a whole needs to pay close attention to the issue of flour fortification, warned AWB's Andrew Lindberg. If it doesn't, it risks governments imposing rules that are hard to apply and don't do the job.

"Sometimes the legislation you get is not the legislation you want," Lindberg said. The answer is to make sure the industry is leading on flour fortification, not following government demands. "We need to lead it, not lag it," he said. **WG**

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Conference photos courtesy of FFI.

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