

EAT-Lancet's India report stresses on need for substantial dietary shifts

Friday, 05 April, 2019, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

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One of the most influential public health documents of this decade, the EAT-Lancet Commission's Food Planet Health, was formally released for India on Thursday at the headquarters of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The report stated that transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts.

Global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will have to double, and consumption of foods such as red meat and sugar will have to be reduced by more than 50%. A diet rich in plant-based foods, and with fewer animal source foods, confers both improved health and environmental benefits.

Authored by 37 international experts, including two from India, who were brought together by EAT, the science-based global platform for food system transformation, and Lancet, one of the world's most prestigious peer-reviewed general medical journals published weekly since 1823, the EAT-Lancet Commission's report, for the first time ever, proposed scientific targets for what constitutes a healthy diet derived from a sustainable food system.

It added that healthy diets had an optimal caloric intake and consisted largely of a diversity of plant-based foods and low amounts of animal-source foods, contained unsaturated rather than saturated fats, and limited amounts of refined grains, highly processed foods and added sugars.

The report also called for doubling in the consumption of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts, and a greater than 50 per cent reduction in global consumption of less healthy foods, such as added sugars and red meat (primarily by reducing excessive consumption in wealthier countries).

EAT-Lancet also proposed a country-specific report for a reference diet for India, which was also supported by the country's apex food regulator, which stated that the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, can play a large part in producing such a report

for Indian conditions related to the north, east, south and west regions.

Meanwhile, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), a global initiative launched by the United Nations in 2012 to make nutritious food more affordable, and Tasting India, an international platform for food policy advocacy, partnered with FSSAI to present the event and share the key takeaways with their respective social media audiences.

“The programme has been planned in a way to create a nationwide conversation around the document,” said Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI.

He added, “A video report will also be prepared for distribution among key stakeholders, via FSSAI’s Network of Professionals of Health and Nutrition (NetProFan), so that they, in turn, hold workshops to prepare action plans based on the recommendations of the report.”

Agarwal told that the strategy was an expression of the FSSAI’s belief that consumer empowerment was the key element of its strategy to create a market demand for safe food and healthy diets.

“With 1.35 billion people, that is one out of six people globally here in India, the country will soon surpass China to become the most populated nation in the world, and that too, with one-third of the landmass of China,” he added.

“Feeding all our people, a healthy diet in a sustainable manner without compromising our ecology and environment is going to be the most important challenge for us in the coming decades. Therefore, the framework provided in this report is very, very important to us in India,” Agarwal said.

Present on the occasion were Brent Loken, director, Science Translation, EAT; K Srinath Reddy, one of the two Indian commissioners on the EAT-Lancet Commission, and President, Public Health Foundation of India, and Lawrence Haddad, World Food Prize winner and executive director, GAIN.

Also, policy-makers, development agencies, embassy representatives, farmers’ associations, food tech entrepreneurs, researchers and students were present at this event, which was webcast live to 43 colleges across the country.

Additionally, three groups of students from reputed institutes of nutrition, food technology and food waste management presented their analyses of the report to provide the perspective of the generation of future leaders.