

UNILEVER'S POSITION ON FORTIFICATION



Background

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies contribute substantially to the global burden of diseases and impair healthy growth and development of children. The most widespread [micronutrient deficiencies](#) globally are those related to iron, iodine, vitamin A and zinc. In addition, inadequate intakes of vitamin D, vitamin B12, folate and calcium are known to also significantly impact people's health.

Micronutrient deficiencies are not only present in developing countries, but also in developed countries. Globally, it is estimated that more than 2 billion people do not get enough vitamins and minerals. This is more than one quarter of the world's population. In particular women, infants and children are vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies with severe consequence for their health.

Micronutrient intake can be increased by promoting diverse diets, providing dietary supplements, and fortifying foods, which is the practice of adding small and safe amounts of essential micronutrients to food products. World-leading economists have identified food fortification as one of the most cost-effective approaches to meet the nutritional needs of populations throughout the world¹.

Context

For the past decade, we have been improving the nutritional quality of our foods and beverages through our *Unilever Sustainable Living Plan* (USLP) s. In 2020 we announced [Future Foods](#) our bold new set of commitments to help people transition towards healthier diets and reduce the environmental impact of the food chain.

We have committed to increasing our offering of plant-based meat and dairy alternatives, continuing to lower calories, salt, and sugar across all our products and doubling the number of products that deliver positive nutrition with products containing impactful amounts of vegetables, fruits, proteins, or micronutrients.

Health authorities recognize the need for fortification to improve micronutrient intake in the population. In WHO's *Essential Nutrition Actions Plan* published in

¹ Copenhagen consensus 2008. Malnutrition and Hunger Challenge Paper.



2019, fortification of condiments and staple foods with micronutrients is recommended as a multi-sectorial approach to combat micronutrient deficiencies². Moreover, there is strong evidence that large scale food fortification is an effective strategy for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and it has been recommended in the third Lancet series for addressing maternal and child undernutrition³.



Unilever's position

We are committed to help tackling micronutrient deficiencies in several ways, in both developed and developing countries. We offer fortified foods at an affordable price for example by using iodized salt in our savoury products, and Maizena porridges with 12 micronutrients. In addition, we recognize the importance of diverse, sustainable, and healthy diets. Therefore, we develop products with nutritious ingredients such as vegetables, fruit, dairy, and vegetable oils and promote nutritious cooking through our recipes.

For fortification of our products, we have the following guiding principles:

1. We choose commonly consumed affordable products that are part of the diet of people that are most in need, and which are generally accepted as suitable vehicles for fortification. Thereby our fortification efforts deliver the best possible benefit for consumers. Furthermore, we may fortify additional products where specific consumer concerns are addressed
2. Our internal guidelines for food fortification are applicable to our global portfolio, and are based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Food Agriculture Organisation (FAO) directions. All Unilever's fortified products must comply with international and local regulations and guidelines, such as *Codex alimentarius*.
3. When fortifying our products, we aim to deliver at least 15% of the recommended daily intake per serving unless regulated differently.

² World Health Organization. Essential Nutrition Actions Plan 2019

³ Keats et al. Effective interventions to address maternal and child malnutrition: an update of the evidence. Lancet Child Adolesc Health 2021





4. Finally, we ensure that our fortified products are always safe to consume, for both the target and non-target population.

Working with others

To maximise our impact, we believe that it is important to work in partnership with public health organisations and governments. By building transparent and effective partnerships, establishing clear responsibilities and promoting an enabling legislative environment, we can address barriers for fortification, achieve a more sustainable food system through food fortification and contribute to a healthier future.

Creating an enabling regulatory environment: Local regulations should not be an obstacle for international trade in those cases where unintended effects for consumers are not to be expected. Where possible, the micronutrient vehicles as well as products allowed for fortification should be harmonized. For example, we support the [WHO's call for action](#) on iodised salt in processed foods and are calling for legislation requiring that all salt for use in food manufacturing shall be iodised. We work with a multi-stakeholder consortium including *Iodine Global Network (IGN)*, *EU Salt*, *World Iodine Association (WIA)* and *Culinaria Europe* and call on the European Commission to put the increasing prevalence of iodine deficiency back on the public health agenda, and to address regulatory hurdles for the free movement of foods containing iodised salt in Europe.

Informing consumers on the benefits of fortified foods: Consumers should be educated on the benefits of micronutrients for health and on the strategies of how they can achieve an adequate intake of micronutrients. Therefore, it is essential that consumers can make informed choices based on information in consumer-friendly language on pack of fortified products. For example, we apply government endorsed local logos for fortification, and we launch our products together with campaigns to increase awareness of micronutrients and teach consumers to make meals more nutritious

Using data on micronutrient intake to develop effective and safe fortified foods: Data on micronutrient intake and status of different population groups is essential





to indicate the needs and track progress of fortification efforts. We encourage governments and health authorities to monitor micronutrient status and intake of their populations in order to ensure that fortified foods are effective and safe. By building transparent and effective partnerships, establishing clear responsibilities and promoting an enabling legislative environment, we can achieve a more sustainable food system through food fortification and contribute to a healthier future.

What did we achieve already?

In 2017 we launched our Fortification Commitment: 'By 2022, we're aiming to provide more than 200 billion servings with at least one of the five key micronutrients, vitamin A, D, iodine, iron and zinc'.

By the end of 2020 we delivered over 125 billion servings of products in both developed and developing countries that are fortified with at least one of the critical micronutrients. Examples of products that are contributing to these servings are:

- Knorr and Royco bouillons with iron
- Many of our savoury products containing iodized salt
- Maizena and Horlicks with multiple micronutrients

Our progress towards delivering these commitments is published annually and can be found at <https://www.unilever.com/planet-and-society/positive-nutrition/strategy-and-goals/>.

What more will we do

In 2020, as part of the *Future Foods* initiative, we committed to double the number of products delivering positive nutrition, which also includes food fortification with micronutrients beyond the five mentioned in our fortification commitment. For example, because of the shift towards a more plant-based diet, populations may risk a lower intake of essential micronutrients such as calcium, iron, zinc and vitamin B12.

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