



## CNE Dairy Day 2022: Sustainable diets – the complicated truth

On 3 March, the Consumer Education Project (CEP) of Milk SA hosted their first Continuing Nutrition Education event for health professionals for the year. With increasing calls for consumers to shift to a more plant-based diet, the day's presentations focused on the important role of animal protein – and specifically the contribution from dairy – in healthy, sustainable diets. Renowned international and local speakers shared current evidence-based research with delegates to, in turn, inform their consultations with clients.

In his presentation, **Prof. Frank Mitloehner**, director of the CLEAR Center at the University of California Davis, explained why we should rethink the contribution of methane to global warming. Because methane forms part of the biogenic carbon cycle, dairy farming has the potential to pull methane from the air and produce animal-source protein with a net zero warming effect. Ultimately *how* we produce food has a bigger effect on sustainable diets than *what* we eat.

The subsequent talk by **Prof. Alice Stanton** of RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ireland focused on the importance of animal-sourced foods for human health. She unpacked concerns about the reference diet suggested by the recent EAT Lancet report by comparing the health effects of animal-sourced and plant-based foods. The presentation highlighted why critical review of evidence is important to inform dietary decisions, rather than recommendations being based on modelled estimates.

**Prof Mieke Faber** of the South African Medical Research Council offered a local perspective on what sustainable diets mean and focused on the importance of variety in creating a healthy diet, especially in context of the South African consumer. A key consideration nutritionists have to keep in mind when advising clients is that a healthy diet is not necessarily a sustainable diet – and similarly that a sustainable diet is not necessarily healthy. When developing diets, the aim should therefore be to strike a balance between promoting health and exerting low environmental pressure.

In light of recent media attention, **Claire Julsing-Strydom**, registered dietitian and independent nutrition consultant, shared an overview of concerns about the role of dairy in inflammation. Current evidence shows that the consumption of milk and dairy does not contribute to chronic inflammation and does not elicit a pro-inflammatory response in patients with underlying metabolic conditions. More evidence is needed to identify dairy foods that may have specific anti-inflammatory properties.

The day concluded with a panel discussion, in which delegates had an opportunity to interact with the speakers directly and share thoughts and questions with their peers.

Christine Leighton, CEP project manager, notes: “Health professionals are important allies in consumer education and an event like this is an opportunity for colleagues to stay up to date with new research developments, share knowledge and walk away equipped to answer clients’ questions about sustainable diets confidently and backed by solid scientific evidence. And after two years of virtual meetings, the CEP is delighted to connect with health professionals in person again and share the message about the goodness of milk and dairy.”

Recordings of the day can be accessed here

<https://www.rediscoverdairy.co.za/cne-2022-online-recordings/>

An Initiative by the Consumer Education Project of Milk SA

