

*Promising Agriculture & Food policies and  
innovations to better health and nutrition in Latin  
America and the Caribbean*

## **Request for Proposals**

### **1. Overview**

This RFP will fund 3 research proposals that aim to show how existing or potential agriculture and food policies or technological innovations (e.g. biotechnology) can make a contribution to population health and diet with focus on obesity and non-communicable disease in Latin America and the Caribbean. Proposals that incorporate issues of agriculture sustainability, preservation of culinary traditions or promote collaboration between agriculture and public health professionals are particularly encouraged.

The policies under scrutiny are expected to show potential or actual population impact on health/nutrition by way of modifying one or some of the following aspects: agriculture and trade policies, food security, food and nutrition policies and consumer behaviors (e.g. food-purchasing behavior and food consumption patterns).

The deadline for the submission of proposal is September 4, 2009

### **2. Background**

For almost two decades, Public Health authorities and experts combating the twin epidemics of obesity and chronic diseases have reached the consensus that a “westernization” of dietary patterns, characterized by a high consumption of sugars, fat, salt, meat and processed foods have contributed to the emergence of obesity and associated chronic conditions. The consensus has extended to the concept that environmental and policy changes are central to population behavioral change.

**The proposed population increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables** can not rest solely on improving information or education. Hence, the WHO *Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity and Health* welcomes that "...some governments have taken measures, including market incentives, to promote the development, production and marketing of food products that contribute to a healthy diet and are consistent with national or international dietary recommendations" (WHO, Global Strategy, 2004). More or less in the same vein, in 2006 the International Food Policy Research Institute launched the initiative *2020 Vision* with the goal of "a world where every person has access to sufficient food to sustain a healthy and productive life, where malnutrition is absent, and where food originates from efficient, effective, and low-cost food systems that are compatible with sustainable use of natural resources." (IFPRI <http://www.ifpri.org/2020/2020about.asp> accessed March 2009).

**Maximizing agriculture production** has been a dominant paradigm in agriculture after II WW; while health/nutrition considerations were assumed to automatically follow a growing output and economic prosperity (Lang T, 2006). This is clearly illustrated by the US Farm Bill where "Nutrition" is only one of seven titles dealing with Commodities, Conservation, Trade, Credit, Rural Development and Research. A single-minded emphasis on over-production led to an industry focus on cheap grains and animal-based commodities rather bringing innovation to the production of fruits and vegetables. The deleterious health and environmental consequences of that practice have been the subject of extensive research and made possible the emergence of alternative practices and claims for new policies congruent with current environmental, health and nutrition needs (IATP, Food without Thought, 2006).

**The current food crisis and the challenges of climate change and bioenergy** on food security and nutrition are adding to the complexity of this situation in the Region. There is a need for the development of sustainable and "health promoting" agriculture policies that encourage good farming practices which are compatible with the new climate conditions and which contribute to protecting the environment. Agriculture policies in most countries need to go through critical reforms in order to produce healthy and safe foods while being environmentally and socio-economically sustainable and addressing the current challenges of climate change. Agriculture reforms provide a framework to address climate change adaptation strategies for health outcomes related to food security, food safety and nutrition while offering an opportunity to integrate adaptation and mitigation strategies to climate change within the agriculture and livestock sectors.

**Some examples from Latin America** can be cited on the connection of existing agricultural policies and their potential impact on nutrition. Chile, for instance, a leading fruit exporter, introduced key policy decisions in the 1970s, among them, deregulation of agricultural policy, privatized land ownership, which gave more favorable conditions for foreign investment and liberalized trade. These policies received a boost in the mid-1980s, with the provision of tax incentives to improve exports and more provision to increase foreign investment. The result was an explosion of exports and increased consumption of Chilean fruits and vegetables. While a parallel availability of fruit and vegetables in the local market occurred during that period, the local average consumption of 160 grams/person/day of fruits and vegetables (Vio F, 2008) is well below the recommended 400 grams (WHO, 2003). This situation has led to the emergence of several initiatives seeking innovative trade and marketing strategies of fruits and vegetables to increase *domestic* consumption.

Another policy example comes from programs that link horticultural producers direct to markets. One example is the Family Farming Food Acquisition Program, part of the Zero Hunger Program in Brazil. In the program, the government purchases food produced by family farms. The program

ensures food supplies for poor families, school meals and public hospitals while creating a market for the small farming sector. There are some claims that the program has had a positive nutritional impact in northeastern Brazil.

Changes could also be made on the production side to improve quality. Crop breeding programs are now beginning to focus on increasing nutrient quality. “Biofortification” of staple foods is now a strategy to increase micronutrient intake and being used in Mexico, Peru and Brazil. Crop fertilization practices can also be used to improve food nutrient quality.

Similarly, livestock feeding practices affect meat quality. The development of intensive cattle production in Latin America on feedlots is a negative development in this regard, because grain-fed meat has a poorer fatty acid profile relative to grass-fed meat. Evidence from Mexico, Argentina and Chile indicates that livestock feeding practices can be used to raise meat with healthier fat profiles.

### **3. Proposals must include the following:**

- Show potential or actual population impact on health/nutrition as a result of manipulating some of the following aspects: agriculture and trade policies, food security issues, food and nutrition policies, food marketing and consumer behaviors;
- Original analysis or interpretation of (existing) data must support project’s main thesis or proposition;
- Show collaboration of public health scientists and experts on agriculture or food policy;
- Projects that incorporate issues of agriculture sustainability or preservation of culinary traditions are a plus.

### **4. Eligible Applicants:**

- The Principal-Investigator must be an “in-country” professional from any of the region’s countries (Latin American & the Caribbean) and must be affiliated to an institution with identifiable research experience;

### **5. Proposals characteristics:**

All proposals should be written according to the following specifications and should not exceed 2,500 words, excluding sections *a*, *b* and *f*.

#### **a. Title of the project:**

**b. Principal Investigator/s and Co-PIs:** Principal Investigator/s: full name, institutional affiliation, institutional web site address, street address, phone/fax numbers and email address. Provide only names and institution affiliation of Co-PIs.

**c. Objectives:** Clear definition of what this proposal is planning to achieve. Emphasize the relevance of the study to public policy and its purported public health impact.

**d. Background:** Explain the existing scientific knowledge on the subject matter, and the existing information gap/s that the project addresses.

**e. Methods:**

- Explain what are you planning to do;
- If you are planning to use an existing data-base, explain its characteristics and how it will be obtained and the analytical strategy: detail data management and the analysis plan, responsibilities etc.
- Methodology for policy analysis: e.g. Health Impact Assessments, Comparative case studies analysis, Robust Decision Making, Eco-systems approach, etc.
- Provide dummy tables of key findings
- Describe co-authors specific responsibilities.

**f. References:** Include no more than 20 references;

**g. Language:** English

## **6. Selection Committee:**

The SC will be integrated by three members whose names will be disclosed after their deliberations are over and the grants awarded.

## **7. About the grants:**

The three best proposals will receive a grant of **US\$ 25,000.00**

## **8. Timeline for proposals selection:**

- September 4, 2009: Dead line for submission of proposals.
- November 24, 2009: Announcement of selected proposals.
- December 18, 2009: PAHO signs a contract with awardees
- June 24, 2010: Submission of final manuscripts

## **9. Submission of Proposals:**

- Applications consist of one electronic Word document, letter page size, TR 12 font, and double space. This doc must be sent as an attachment to an email message of submission;
- Email applications with a Subject: **PAHO RFP FOOD POLICY & HEALTH** must be sent to Dr. Enrique Jacoby, email addresses: [jacobyen@paho.org](mailto:jacobyen@paho.org) with copy to [bennette@paho.org](mailto:bennette@paho.org) no later than September 4, 2009, 02:00PM (US Eastern Time).

## **10. Final manuscripts and publication**

PAHO/WHO expects to sponsor a collective publication in an influential Public Health journal; therefore, authors are encouraged to send their manuscripts following general guidelines for publication in peer-reviewed journals.