

Strategic Programme

Healthy Safe Diets (Diet and Health) Theme

Introduction

The Scottish Government Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services division (RESAS) has initiated a Strategic Research Programme to address major policy issues and deliver evidence based information vital to Scotland's future prosperity and wellbeing.

The Strategic Programme is being carried out through collaboration between leading teams of scientists across the range of Main Research Providers* and is being delivered through two interlinked, multidisciplinary programmes: Environmental Change (Local Responses to Global Change) and Food, Land and People (Optimising the Potential of Scotland's Natural Assets). The Diet and Health Theme is a component of the Food Land and People-Programme.

Diet and Health Theme Key aims and objectives.

In order to understand what constitutes a healthy diet, we must understand what are the components of the food we eat and the contribution they make to our health and wellbeing. This theme concentrates on this aspect. There are two work packages within the Theme. The first concentrates on the relationship between consumer choice, diet and health, and the second tests how to improve the health benefits of food through production and processing. The objectives relate to policy, especially in relation to obesity, optimising food quality and sustainability, and to industry by improving our understanding of what constitutes healthy food and how we might produce it economically.

Intended benefits from the Diet and Health Theme's research.

- Understand how food and food components make us feel full up (induce satiety)
- Identify which policies options might be most effective in improving eating behaviour
- Identify methods of improving the health values of food and food products why they help.
- Improve quality and safety of food and identify the barriers to providing food with improved quality
-

Key policy documents underpinning the theme.

- Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Route Map Towards Healthy Weight (2010), the related action plan (2011) and analytical framework (2010)
- Scotland's National Food & Drink Policy "Recipe for Success" (2009), Food & Drink Health and Environmental Sustainability Framework (2011)
- Healthy Eating, Active Living (2008)
- Maternal and Infant Nutrition Strategy (2010)
- Good Places, Better Health for Scotland's Children (2011)

Theme Research Activity

The relationship between consumer choice, diet and health

This seeks to understand what are the barriers to taking up a healthy and sustainable diet for all the people of Scotland, and to develop strategies to improve it. This includes research to understand the mechanisms that induce satiety, to provide evidence to persuade people to limit their calorie intake. We are also studying dietary components (sugars, fats, micronutrients) and how they contribute to health and wellbeing.

Benefits of the research

- Benefits of this research include, but are not limited to, a better understanding of the factors that modulate consumer behaviour in relation to buying food, and the relationship of socio-economic status to these behaviours, an understanding of the factors that control satiety in different proteins and the relationship of obesity to health and well being.
- We will also produce useful data on nutrition at different stages in the life course, which will help inform policy guidelines and assist manufacturers in formulating healthy foods.
- We will also develop markers of health status, which will be critical in determining how effective nutritional interventions will be in improving health.

Enhancing health benefits from food through production and processing

It is clear that the diet of many people in Scotland can be improved. One way of helping to resolve the problem is to improve the nutritional value of the food that we are already eating (health through stealth). This WP examines different stages in the production process, including methods to improve food nutritionally by introducing changes in farming techniques. By proving the health benefits of Scotland's produce we will also help the food and drink industry to improve nutritional quality and marketing strategies.

Benefits expected from the research

- Improved varieties of soft fruits and cereals
- Identifying and improving the health giving components
- Identifying how different feeding regimes alters the nutritional profile of meat and Scottish farmed fish
- A better understanding of how food components interact with each other
- Methods to identify where foods come from for authentication

Key email contact

Theme leader Healthy Safe Diets

h.mcardle@abdn.ac.uk

WP co-ordinator, The relationship between consumer choice, diet and health

j.mercer@abdn.ac.uk

WP co-ordinator, Enhancing health benefits from food through production and processing

p.haggarty@abdn.ac.uk

KTE manager

s.bird@abdn.ac.uk