

Brussels Monday, 03 February 2020

CEFS PROVIDES INFORMATION COMPLEMENTING THE 2019 EAT- LANCET COMMISSION REPORT

In January 2019, the EAT-Lancet Commission issued a report entitled "Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems".¹ The Lancet journal is a recognized medical journal. Among the many initiatives the journal is taking the lead on, it has taken up as objective to be a source of information about nutrition, which the journal deems it is not effectively addressed globally. It therefore undertook to publish a series of reports to approach nutrition from several perspectives.

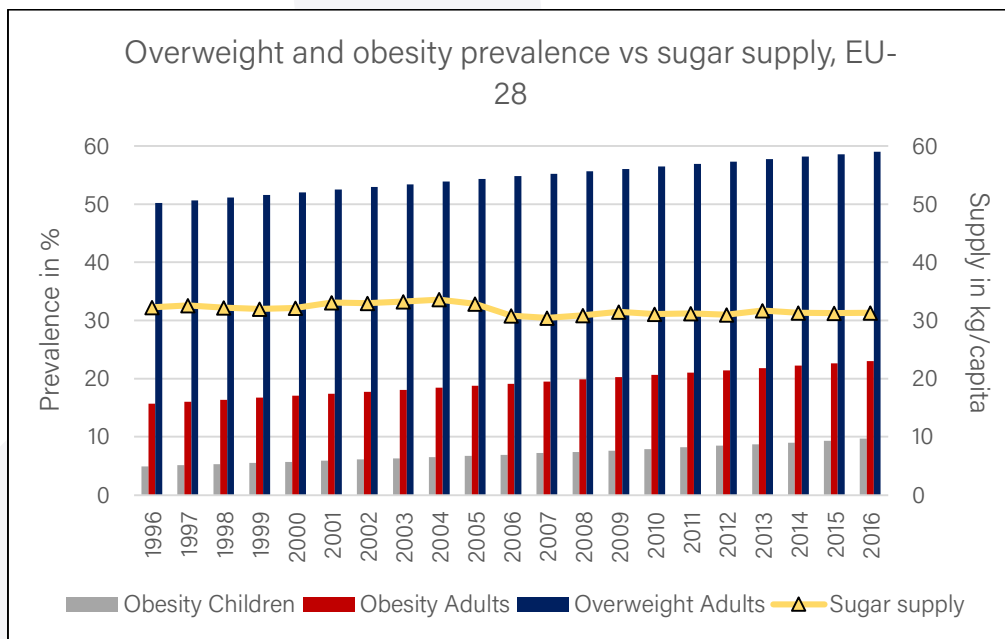
The EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets for Sustainable Food Systems is a partnership between the Lancet and EAT, described as "a non-profit startup dedicated to transforming our global food system through sound science, impatient disruption and novel partnerships." It is founded by the Stordalen Foundation, Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Wellcome Trust. The EAT-Lancet Commission gathers a series of academics and a series of co-authors many of which work for EAT or the founding organisations.

The EAT-*Lancet* Commission report makes a number of assertions that require clarification. CEFS addresses them below.

From the nutrition aspect

- Contrarily to what the report states, sugar consumption has not skyrocketed in Europe. Sugar consumption and supply remain stable while obesity and overweight are increasing.

EU-28 development of overweight and obesity prevalence against domestic sugar supply. Trend based on OECD and FAO data



- The EAT-*Lancet* Commission report repeats (and even goes further than) the already known WHO *conditional* recommendation to limit sugars intake to less than 5% of total energy.
 - This recommendation was based purely on dental health data from the 1960s, where oral hygiene was scarce and at a time when the monitoring criteria for these types of surveys were not yet established; this evidence was deemed by WHO themselves to be of very low-quality.
 - In Western countries, caries has declined in children and teenagers over the past 40 years.

- To be effective, consumption recommendations should take into account the overall quality of the diet rather than focusing on specific nutrients. Sugar intake, for instance, must be looked at in the broader picture of a lifestyle pattern of unbalanced diet and sedentary lifestyles.
 - Sugar as a nutrient on a stand-alone basis does not cause obesity. The effect of sugars on weight gain is due to the consumption of excess calories but not to a specific effect of sugars *as such*.
 - Sugar does not cause diabetes; overweight, physical inactivity and age are the most important risk factors for Type-2 diabetes.

- The various health effects that the report claims are derived from sugars intake (e.g. Type 2 diabetes) are life-long diseases. Many studies that show a link between sugars consumption and these diseases are studies that show correlation but not causality. The studies' design does not allow assessing all variables that come into play throughout the human life span, and which may impact the correlation between sugars intake and life-long diseases. For instance, people who have a high consumption of certain sugary products (such as sugar-sweetened beverages) often show other behaviours that increase the risk of adverse health effects (such as unbalanced diets in general and sedentary lifestyle).
- Also, many studies of the EAT-*Lancet* Commission report are based on US data/consumption patterns, which are different from EU's.
- Food taxes do not have a real impact on obesity and thus diet-related chronic diseases.

From the sustainability aspect

- Beet sugar production is environmentally sustainable
 - The sector has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030
 - Sugar beets provide up to 90% of the water used in the sugar factories
 - The beet sugar manufacturing process generates no food waste: every part of the beet is used for many outlets next to sugar: biogas, animal feed, bio-based products, etc.
 - Sugar beet is crucial for crop rotation, an Integrated Pest Management technique that allows for adequate crop protection and sugar beet production.
 - Sugar beet is a very efficient crop, no other crop delivers as high a yield per hectare
- In Europe, the food vs fuel concern referred to in the EAT-*Lancet* Commission Report is more or less a 'non-issue' as in many cases, raw materials can be processed into both food *and* fuel.

ⁱ Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-*Lancet* Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. Jan 2019, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4).