

October blog Fabio Gomes

Water, ultra-processed foods, and our living and physical world's future: these are three of the themes of the Porto congress just ended that I bring you here. Then I move back to Brazil, and celebrate nutrition and arts from the state of Pernambuco. After that, I reflect on pesticides – or, let's name them for what they are, poisons. Finally, my joke is about the efforts of the Coca-Cola company to save the planet.

Porto 2010. Bottled water

Six hours of words from our sponsor

Water is a public good. Clean safe drinking water is and should be a human right. The first day of the Porto congress featured four hours with a starry line-up of speakers, on Hydration, Beverages and Health, sponsored by the Danone Waters division. The morning session was on 'Hydration, beverages, satiety and health'. The afternoon session was on 'Governmental and regulatory actions across the globe'. The congress also featured two other sessions on hydration. Why so much on (horrible word) 'hydration'? Why only one session during the whole of the Porto congress on breastfeeding? Could this be because nobody has yet worked out how to patent and brand breastmilk and how to get A-list women to tattoo their breasts and backsides with company logos?

The Danone hydration session presentations, and also discussion, focused on the question: What should be inside the bottles offered to us for sale? In the absence of bottled water, it was implied, populations would be driven to drink from other bottles containing sugary and artificially sweetened drinks. Speakers stressed that this is a big issue in low and middle income countries where it is less safe to have tap water.

Commercialisation of water

Are we in public health nutrition being asked to accept that tap water is not an option? Are we assuming that we are going to promote the dependence of countries (especially the poorest) on the worldwide corporations dedicated to bottling the public good of water? I call you to watch again the video I cited in my June column (1,2). [Click here!](#)

The second two-hour Danone hydration session in the afternoon of the first day, kept the discussion restricted to what government and industry should do, in order to put across the message that it is best to invest in bottled water. The main question was: What is best, to have bottled water or bottled sugary drinks? I concluded from what I heard that Danone Waters Ltd. is helping us to address the obesity epidemic by shifting the consumption from sugary drinks to water, simply because Danone is now investing countless \$US millions in bottled water. Danone also manufactures calorie bombs in the form of cookies.

Participants in the Danone hydration sessions were able to refresh their discussions afterwards by drinking the free bottled water provided everywhere within the congress building by yes, you have got it in one, Danone Waters. Perfect marketing: public health nutritionists and related professionals drinking Danone bottled water, and clutching and circulating within the congress venue and surrounding areas, Danone bottled water. It could have been worse. If Danone had not provided bottled water, perhaps participants would be drinking and promoting Coca-Cola™ instead.

Are we in international public health nutrition, happy to become talking walking

This month's commentary World Nutrition



Keith West

Rolf Klemm

Alfred Sommer

**Why vitamin A
supplementation is
a global life-saver**

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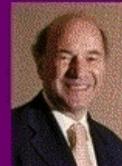
This month's editorial World Nutrition HOT TOPIC

**Conferences: what for.
The future blueprint**

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Geoffrey Cannon



Hot gossips from Porto
Are booze and drugs nourishing?
The relevance of Susan Sontag

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HOT SESSIONS

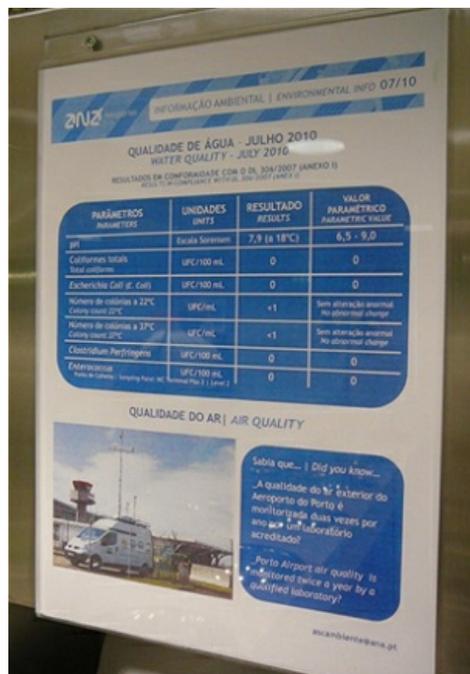
Frank fair fearless firm
reviews of the best
(and not quite so best)
sessions at Porto

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advertisements for the food, drink, and 'hydration' industries?

Protecting tap water

I have some bad news for Danone Waters, and the Porto organisers who agreed that four and more hours of the congress in effect be advertisement and promotion for Danone. This is also excellent news for public health. See the picture below, of what I found in a restroom in Porto's international airport on my way home to Rio. There is perfectly safe and clean tap water! The airport is investing in getting user credibility, by posting information about the quality parameters of the tap water. I drank a glass. Cool, delicious, fresh, safe. And free – well, so far, maybe on my next visit to the Euro-zone, its water will have become privatised.



References

1. Gomes F. What my parents have taught me, and other items. [Column] Website of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, June 2010. Obtainable at www.wphna.org.
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se12y9bSOM0>

Porto 2010. Food processing The worlds in which we live

On the final day of the Porto congress I attended a debate session. This had my colleague Carlos Monteiro proposing that 'Ultra-processed foods are adverse to human health', with John Lupien opposing.

One of Carlos's points is that the transnational and big national food and drink manufacturers exert great pressure to squeeze out the traditional foods from the Brazilian diet and to maximise the share of their branded ultra-processed foods. This has already been done in countries like the US and UK. He showed examples of Nestlé's strategies to reach traditional Amazon people whose diets are so far almost entirely traditional. Nestlé is penetrating the Amazon, by launching 'floating supermarkets' which are in effect hoardings and advertisements for Nestle, boats just selling their ultra-processed products, projected at impoverished communities living around the Amazon (1).

John Lupien said we should get real, and live in the modern world. Processed food is the way it is, he said. This made me think: What if someone suddenly hit you in the face while you walked home? Would you say 'That's the way it is'? This also reminded me of meeting I attended at another nutrition congress, to discuss the sponsorship policies of future congresses. Several colleagues asked the organisers to restrict the current unlimited participation and visibility of food industry in their congresses. The answer was: 'This is the way it is, this is how it happens'. Sorry about the fierce analogy, but folks in Germany said that sort of thing on first learning about the extermination by the Nazis of the Jews.

Claudio Schuftan



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Structural reasons for world poverty
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Fabio Gomes



Why it's best to eat fruits in season
Brazil is being poisoned by pesticides
Candid camera: what agronomists eat

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The voice of public health nutrition
Our aims & objectives
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Reggie Annan



Big issues, big pictures in Africa
A new African nutrition society
MDGs: looking on the bright side

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Food-based control and prevention of undernutrition
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
International symposium, Rome, 7-9 December
Here is how to participate
[Access full information here](#)

Coming in November

John Lupien highlighted the importance of food processing. But one question was not answered. This is: What should be the share of ultra-processed foods in our diets? Another issue is, we do indeed live in the real world, but which one? The Brazilian world is so far very different from the US world, when we are talking about ultra-processed foods. In Brazilian one-third of diets are on average composed of ultra-processed foods, whereas in John Lupien's native land, the US, almost nine tenths come from ultra-processed foods. We Brazilians wish to protect our traditional diets, based on Brazilian staples, and our intention is to reverse the current trend and to reduce the amount of ultra-processed foods.

After the session I talked with Walter Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health. He too is hostile to ultra-processing, but he said that it is possible to achieve a healthy diet with a fairly high share of ultra-processed foods. True. But he also lives as a privileged professional and family member in the US, where 90 per cent of the food supply is ultra-processed. Can and do people who are not educated about nutrition, and who have little choice, construct and afford a healthy diet from what's on offer? I rest my case, and that of Carlos.

Debates in Porto usually ended in a vote. This one did. For the motion proposed by Carlos: 30. Against the motion, as proposed by John Lupien: 0.

Reference

1. <http://blogs.alternet.org/appetiteforprofit/2010/06/20>

Nutritional art

The beautiful taste of food



In Brazil bananas are ripe all year long. In the South-East region, October is the starting season of the most common banana in Brazil, the silver banana (*banana prata*). Instead of a photograph, this month I bring you above the art of J. Borges. José Francisco Borges was born in Bezerros, Pernambuco. From the age of 8 he worked with his father in the land, and at 10 he started to make and sell handmade toys.

In the 1960s he wrote his best-seller *O Encontro de Dois Vaqueiros no Sertão de Petrolina*, (1). For many years he has depicted in colour and in black and white, Brazil and its culture through *cordel* (popular verse) literature and *xilogravura* (woodcuts), of day to day Brazil. So now here is a *cordel* written by Gilbamar de Oliveira:

The north-eastern cuisine
 (A culinária nordestina)
 is modest but varied
 (é modesta porém variada)
 pleasing any palate.
 (agradando qualquer paladar)
 It has couscous with milk,
 (tem cuscuz com leite, buchada),
 coconut mixed with raw sugar
 (a boa cocada de rapadura)...

World Nutrition



Carlos Monteiro

PORTO DEBATE

**Food processing
is the big issue**

WVN

July commentary
Colothur Gopalan



C Gopalan

My life in nutrition

**The testimony of our first
honorary life member**

[Access Dr Gopalan's
September commentary here](#)
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WVN

July commentary
Urban Jonsson



...

Serve yourselves with sweet pumpkin,
(*Sirvam-se de doce de jerimum*)
made by mother, and banana or cashew,
(*de mamãe, banana ou caju,*)
guava in syrup or jam,
(*goiaba em calda ou compota,*)
mangaba and cocktail of umbu,
(*mangaba e batida de umbu,*)
the glory of rice pudding,
(*arroz doce, um espetáculo,*)
and how about a little honey of urucu?
que tal um melzinbo de urucu?

As you see, many names here are of delicious native and established Brazilian fruits for which there is no English name.

I eat fruits in season because I don't like this idea that all fruits are available all year round. In Brazil, many of them are, but only because of absurd air miles and outrageous carbon footprints. People often say now that technology is now able to produce almost any vegetable and fruit in any circumstances, anywhere, any time. Is this good? I think not. Let's follow the seasons.

Reference

1. http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._Borges

Popular knowledge

Evidence based decisions

Remember my last column? I started by celebrating the pleasant weekend I had in Silva Jardim, a rural area of the state of Rio de Janeiro State, with Dona Manuela and her family. (1). Her pleasure and smiles go far beyond the convenience of having fresh herbs in her backyard.

I now introduce what I have to say below. For a long time Dona Manuela used to grow vegetables and 'take care' of her rural property, using 'pesticides' and 'herbicides', which I will now call 'poisons'. But she then associated ailments she was suffering with the handling of poisons. Her neighbours were also suffering. So she decided to quit using them, and her recurrent health problem she was most bothered about vanished. She did not wait to read in the scientific literature of any consistent results from randomised controlled trials.

She now has a strong sensitivity to poisons. When her daughter brings vegetables and fruits from the city, she feels sick, she senses strange odours coming from the beautiful and apparently fresh produce, she senses poison. For her now, this is why growing and talking about growing her own tomatoes, lettuces, herbs, is so pleasant for her.

Reference

1. Gomes F. Spread the taste, and other items. [Column] Website of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, September 2010. Obtainable at www.wpbna.org.

Poisons

The big Brazilian picture

It was only last year that I saw the big Brazilian picture about agricultural poisons. This was in July 2009, during the Third National Seminar on Pesticides, Health and Society, held in Brasília. This brought together many social movements, in addition to the Brazilian government's health and agriculture executives. The discussions ranged from impacts on peasants and consumers health, to environmental and development issues.

The breaking news was that Brazil is now the country that is the top user of poisons in the world, in 2008 passing the USA (1). One of the reasons is that some molecules that had been prohibited for use in China (methyl parathion and methamidophos) (2) and in the US (carbofuran) (3) had to be exported somewhere else. Industry would not, after all, want to lose sales. So with the agreement of the



The rise and fall of pradigms in world food & nutrition policy

[Access Urban Jonsson's July commentary here](#)

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WN

June commentary
Harriet Kuhnlein



Here is the good news

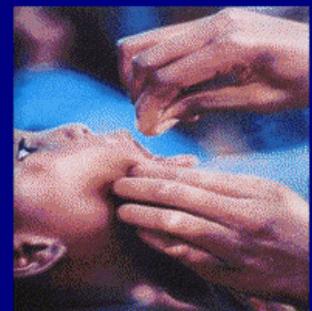
[Access Harriet Kuhnlein's June commentary here](#)

[Access the June editorial here](#)

WN

May commentary
Michael Latham

The great vitamin A fiasco



[Access Michael Latham's May](#)

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national poisons control authorities, they have been dumped on Brazil. That helps to explain why Brazil has reached 800.000 tons of poisons bought in 2008, surpassing the USA (1). Also the 'safe limits' allowed to be found in food are higher in Brazil. For instance, Brazilian soya can include 10mg of glifosato per kilogram, whereas in the USA the limit is 5mg/kg and in Europe 0.2mg/kg (4).

During the seminar I heard what I thought was good news. Brazilian legislation forbids the advertisement of poisons to the general public. But, there is no restriction on advertising and marketing to farmers, the people who use the stuff. Yes, industry can promote their poisons to the people who buy and use them.

There is still more. Medication in Brazil by law has to be re-assessed every five years after its first approval. But once poisons are registered the approval is indefinite. A complex lawsuit must be conducted to require re-assessment and prohibition of molecules; once they get registered they can be out there forever.

The good news

All this said, the Brazilian National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA), has been doing a great job promoting the re-assessment of some molecules. Also, they are increasingly expanding the Analysis Program of Pesticides Residuals in Foods (PARA) (5). This programme takes samples from the sale points of the most consumed fruits, vegetables, beans and cereals in Brazil, and analyses them for the presence of poisons.

This makes the farming industry nervous. Thus, the Brazilian media has run stories based on the results of this sampling, top-ranking the bell pepper in a black list of the vegetables with most irregular poison residuals. This is awful for the bell pepper market. So producers' reaction to the astonishing statistics resulting from their bad harvesting practices is to complain, saying that ANVISA is exaggerating or being alarmist, and that some poisons in food will never harm anybody.

In response, ANVISA has been toning down its media releases. But its work is clearly in the public interest. Take tomatoes. Among all foods analysed in 2007, tomatoes had the higher proportion of over-the-top-limit samples with 44.7 per cent, which dropped in 2009 to 32.6 per cent. (5). Better, although still horrible.

References

1. www.portal.anvisa.gov.br
2. www.communityipm.org
3. Eisler R. *Handbook of Chemical Risk Assessment. Health Hazards to Humans, Plants, and Animals*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2000.
4. www.revistagalileu.globo.com
5. All PARA reports are obtainable at www.portal.anvisa.gov.br

Congresses

Pigging out in Lisbon

There is much less to say than to show in this item. In August I attended the 28th International Horticultural Congress in Lisbon. It was massively sponsored by the poison and commercial seed industries (1). Maybe because of the intensification of use of poisons, the congress organisers changed the emphasis of the buffer dinner reception menu. Here you get a sight of it, in the picture below:



[commentary here](#)
[Access the May editorial here](#)
[Access all June responses here](#)
[Access all July responses here](#)

The picture shows a whole pig barbecue being enjoyed by the congress delegates in the gardens of the Burnay Palace in Lisbon. Were vegetables also available? Oh yes, as shown in the picture below. But as you can see, this magnificent spread was almost entirely ignored. Could this be because the expert delegates were all too aware of the poisons in and on commercially produced vegetables?



Nature®

The congress's central theme was 'Science and Horticulture for People' but its real purpose was 'Science and Horticulture for Profit'. Most of the programme was driven by the profit imperative. Topics included which cultivar market to invest, and choosing whether to grow fruit and vegetables for fresh market, or to food industry to become processed. (Did you think the fruits and vegetables you find at the supermarket are the same as those used as substrate for processed food and drinks?) Other topics included ways to patent fruit.

During the conference I was also introduced to the first commercial Prime-Jim® and Prime-Jan® blackberry varieties (2). The truth is, that almost nothing in the conference had to do with science and horticulture in the service of people. True, various speeches appealed for more novel approaches to tackle the world's food supply needs. These used the old argument that the population is increasing, and for this reason we should push food production increasingly and intensively up.

References

1. <http://www.ibc2010.org/docs/Sponsors.pdf>
2. <http://organic.kysu.edu/Blackberry.shtml>

Joke of the month

Coke™: good eating!



The Coca-Cola Company has developed a new PlantBottle™ This is made from 30 per cent of plant material as well as 70 per cent of the usual polyethylene

terephthalate (PET) plastic (1). Here it is above. As a result Coke™ has received a Gold Medal at the DuPont Awards for Packaging Innovation (2). By the way, besides the plastic sector, DuPont is one of the six biggest companies that drive the poison business worldwide.

Will Coca-Cola now need to take over the Amazon forest to produce the material for these bottles? No. The plant material is made from the residues of sugar cane and molasses (1). That's what we call a real sugary drink!

References

1. http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/nr_20090514_plantbottle.html
2. http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/presscenter/nr_20100525_plantbottle_award.html

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I am a collaborator with Carlos Monteiro on work on the theme of his Porto presentation. This column is reviewed by Geoffrey Cannon. I thank Walter Willet for the challenging talk we had during the congress. I thank Felipe Gomes for sending me the fruits printing images from J. Borges. My many thanks to Manuela for sharing her great knowledge and hospitality.

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October blog: Fabio Gomes
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