

# WP 5: Food Manufacture, Retail and Health

This work package examines how the food industry is responding to current demands to reduce the salt, fat and sugar content of foods and to the challenges involved in product reformulation and other innovations in food manufacturing.

## Context:

- Recent Foresight reports on **obesity, food and farming** have recognised the influence of food product composition on **public health** and the significant relationship between food production and dietary change.
- Reducing the **salt, saturated fat** and energy (primarily **sugar**) content of food products through reformulation is a potentially significant contribution to public health.
- But changing the composition of food through **product reformulation** is not straightforward.

## Aims and Methods:

- The research examined how government concern to address food product formulation influenced the practices of food manufacturers, retailers and consumers.
- It also considered how (producer and consumer) anxieties feature in these practices.
- Multiple qualitative methods were used including interviews with industry representatives, government officials, consumer groups and food scientists; and participant observation with bakery technicians and managers. Site visits were also made to other food manufacturers, together with participation in industry conferences and roundtable discussions on reformulation.
- Secondary sources were also reviewed, including corporate social responsibility statements, government documents and trade publications.



## Findings:

- Anxiety over the salt, sugar and fat levels of food is evident in surveys of **public concern** over food and in the actions of **food manufacturers and retailers**.
- Some progress has been made in reducing these levels, especially with regards to **lowering salt content**.
- However, there are difficult issues concerning **consumer acceptability** of reduced salt, sugar and fat products and the ability of manufacturers to produce such products.
- In the case study of bakery technicians a number of **practices** (collections of routine activity) were identified as significant in the process of new products development. These practices involved: keeping things moving in the factory, doing innovation, and being a baker / food technologist. Actions comprising these practices included responding to customers, trying out product test runs, dealing with incidents, developing technologies, identifying new trends, checking production and delivering training. The importance of these practices means that changing products according to lower salt, fat and sugar levels is not easy. Any **product innovation must fit with routine pressures** to satisfy customers and maintain production.
- Reformulating products to address public health anxieties can have an impact, but significant **social and technical challenges** limit its current potential.



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## Key Publications:

Lee, R.P. (2011) Knowledge Claims and the Governance of Agri-food Innovation. *Agriculture and Human Values*, in press.