

## Revised National Standards for Commercially Produced Complementary Foods to Improve Nutrient Intake in Children

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**Received:** April 28, 2020; **Published:** May 15, 2020

Codex Alimentarius (FAO-WHO) defines formulated complementary foods for older infants and young children (IYC) as foods that are suitable for use during the complementary feeding period. These foods are specially formulated with appropriate nutritional quality to provide additional energy and nutrients to complement the local diet by providing those nutrients which are either lacking or are present in unsatisfactory quantities. Commercially produced complementary foods (CPCF) can contribute to improved nutritional intake for infants and young children provided they are appropriately fortified and of optimal nutrient composition. Studies have shown that it is not always possible to meet the nutrient needs of IYC from local foods alone, particularly in remote settings. Hence, the production and consumption of affordable, nutritious CPCF can help close the nutritional gap and contribute to improved IYC growth. However, Deficiency in national standards may result in the formulation of products high in sugar, salt and trans fatty acids and low in important micronutrients such as iron, zinc, calcium vitamin-A and beta carotene. Studies on packaged complementary foods for sale in low- and middle-income countries reveal a lack of standards that may threaten normal infant growth. Given the high prevalence of stunting (40.2%), overweight (9.5%) and micronutrient deficiencies among children under 5 years of age in Pakistan there is a need for revised national food standards to apply to the manufacture of all CPCFs. It should include the formulation of food products, based on IYC nutritional requirements, processing techniques and hygienic requirements and should incorporate provisions for packaging, labelling and instructions for use. Meeting these standards requires nutrient profiling of CPCFs available in the national market and quality assurance through regular, rigorous monitoring to ensure standards are being adhered to. The development of a CPCF monitoring tool would provide quality assurance standards for both potential producers and potential consumers. In turn, it would support the development of nutritionally rich, affordable and palatable complementary foods.

**Volume 9 Issue 6 June 2020**

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