



- Schweizerischer Verband für alternative Proteinquellen
- Association Suisse pour des sources alternatives de protéines
- Associazione Svizzera per fonti alternative di proteina

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Position paper: Ultra-processed foods

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SPA POSITION ON ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS (UPF)

- Food processing is essential for a safe, healthy and sustainable diet.
- Ultra-processed foods and their effects on health are the subject of intense debate.
- The nutritional quality of food cannot be adequately assessed by the current NOVA classification, as it categorises food by degree of processing rather than by nutritional composition and quality.
- No causal link between the processing of food and adverse health effects can be proven.
- Industrial does not equal ultra-processed and ultra-processed does not equal unhealthy. Therefore, categorisation by degree of processing as a basis for nutritional recommendations and regulations should be rejected.

CONTEXT & POSITION OF THE SPA

Food processing is an indispensable part of our food system and contributes to a safe, healthy and sustainable diet. In particular the processing of alternative protein sources for meat, fish or dairy alternatives promotes a sustainable diet.

Ultra-processed foods and their impact on health are the subject of much debate. The NOVA classification, which categorises food according to the degree of processing and not on the basis of nutrient composition and nutrient quality, is unsuitable for assessing the quality of nutrition and its influence on health.

We therefore reject the NOVA classification as a basis for nutritional recommendations and regulations, as there is no proven causal link between processing and adverse health effects. Industrial does not equal ultra-processed and ultra-processed does not equal unhealthy.

This classification also does not help consumers choose healthier and more sustainable foods because it does not take into account nutrient profiles or the presence of beneficial ingredients such as fibre, protein, fruit or whole grains.

A differentiated approach and a clearer definition of UPF are needed. Many studies on UPF have methodological weaknesses and the research results are contradictory. We therefore call for the promotion of further research to enable a scientifically sound debate and to inform consumers transparently about the advantages and disadvantages of food processing.

CLASSIFICATION & FURTHER INFORMATION

Differentiation of the term ultra-processed food

Not all ultra-processed products can be lumped together, nor can all industrially produced products. For example, frozen peas or fresh pasta may be industrially produced, but they are not ultra-processed. And balanced ready meals with additives are considered ultra-processed, but can be a valuable addition from a nutritional point of view. However, not every meal prepared at home is healthy and balanced.

Safety, availability and shelf life of food

Food processing ensures that food is safe to consume and has a long shelf life. This ensures the availability of sustainable food based on alternative protein sources regardless of seasonal fluctuations and enables a stable, resource-saving supply for the population.

Reduction of food waste

Innovative processing techniques enable raw materials to be utilised efficiently and by-products to be processed. This helps to reduce food waste and conserves natural resources. Food processing is therefore an important lever for improving sustainability along the entire value chain.

Nutrition and health

The processing of food can have a significant positive influence on the (bio)availability of nutrients. Processing methods can reduce antinutritive factors that hinder nutrient absorption and thus facilitate the absorption of certain nutrients by the body. In addition, food processing enables the targeted fortification of essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals to promote the general health of the population and meet specific nutritional needs. This is particularly important at a time of increasing health awareness: food processing does not necessarily mean a high sugar, salt or saturated fat content, but rather the development of foods that meet the requirements of a balanced and sustainable diet and fulfil the trend towards plant-based foods as part of a flexitarian diet.

Promoting innovation and sustainability

The development and implementation of new technologies in food processing, such as fermentation, texturisation and extraction, play a crucial role in creating sustainable food options. Particularly in the case of products made from alternative protein sources, these technologies enable the production of foods that meet the requirements of a modern, health-conscious and environmentally friendly diet. These alternatives for meat, fish or milk offer the greatest potential for reducing environmental impact.