

What in the CFS are you talking about?!

By Meghan Sapp

Don't miss out on the chance to tell the world the truth about sugar as it relates to nutrition, obesity and sustainability too.

Most people in the sugar industry aren't likely aware, but tucked off in the corners of the FAO in Rome twice a year, UN member states meet together with private sector and civil society from all over the world to debate and set policy about food, agriculture and nutrition—and key to this is creating policy cohesion across national and regional efforts. Basically, don't promote sugar production to alleviate poverty on one hand while taxing it so much it erodes demand on the other. But there are much wider issues as well.

The vision for CFS work in advancing nutrition is “a world free from malnutrition in all its forms, where all people at all stages of life and at all times have access to adequate food and enjoy diversified, balanced and healthy diets for an active and healthy life”.

[The Committee on World Food Security](#), called the CFS, is hosted by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation but acts as an independent body reporting directly to the UN General Assembly, bringing together these groups in an effort to ensure food security and nutrition for all.

Everyone in the sugar industry knows that sugar provides cheap calories for impoverished communities while also providing jobs and economic development through the growing of sugarcane and beet, as well as its processing into food, energy, feed and fibre. But there is also growing concern about sugar's role in nutrition beyond providing cheap calories that have roles to play in obesity and diet-related non-communicable disease. [The CFS through its Private Sector Mechanism, the body that organises and facilitates the private sector's participation in the CFS' processes](#), is a key opportunity for the sugar industry to provide science-based information regarding sugar production and consumption to other private sector players such as key FMCG multinationals as well as UN member states and civil society in order to better feed in to policymaking decisions at the global level.

Because, don't be mistaken, the CFS has a strong role in global policy making and those who aren't paying attention—probably 99% of the planet—are missing out on participating in those decisions.

Don't be worried, however. As a member of the PSM in previous roles of the past few years, I have been an active member in these processes, and

now as the newly appointed Managing Director of Sugaronline have been welcomed into the fold in that role as well where I will be a conduit of information regarding sugar to all parts of the CFS as opportunities present themselves.

And right now, there's a major opportunity. The CFS is in the preparing to finalise for approval in [October at its 45th annual meeting the Terms of Reference for the upcoming Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#). The guidelines "are intended to be a reference document that provides guidance mainly to governments, as well as to their partners and other stakeholders, on appropriate policies, investments and institutional arrangements needed to address the key causes of malnutrition in all its forms for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2."

A key aim is to counter existing policy incoherence between food, agriculture and nutrition in order to ensure "the diets needed for optimal nutrition are available, affordable, acceptable, safe and of adequate quantity and quality which conform with the beliefs, culture and tradition of individuals." Issues to be discussed will include food supply chains, food environments and consumer behaviour so expect debate on issues such as storage and distribution, so think of the quality issues identified last year when bulk

storage of sugar in Mombasa was mixed in with dirt, mud and refuse. Food processing and packaging regulations will be discussed, [so no doubt Jamaica will be interested to see how things align with their new sugar packing rules](#). Then of course there will be debate on "the food environment in which consumers make purchasing decisions, influencing consumer behaviour and food consumption patterns" which will provide a direct opportunity for the sugar industry to feed in about sugar and nutrition as well as fight back against the [onslaught of sugar taxes worldwide](#).

As the process is one of inclusive stakeholder engagement at the global level, and it is only really kicking off in October, there is plenty of time to feed in and participate. Regional and online consultations of the zero draft will take place between March and October 2019 with the final version negotiated between March and July 2020 for adoption by the CFS in October 2020.

I will represent Sugaronline during the process and welcome our members to join me in these efforts as well, either in person in Rome and at regional consultations or by sharing with me literature and white papers that can be shared with the PSM and the wider CFS as a whole. There are also opportunities to hold side events on sugar issues relating to nutrition in 2019 and 2020, and encourage you to reach out to me in order to discuss how we may propose these to the PSM.