SESSION 4: DEMAND

How can global partners from the public and private sectors create demand for healthy food at scale? Food choices made by low income families in developing countries are not well understood. Efforts to stimulate demand need to be scaled up in order to create the “market pull” that will increase production of a diverse and healthy food supply.

The global financial crisis and recent rise in world food prices have brought attention to the importance of income on global diets and health, particularly in developing countries where a significant percent of income is spent on food. Knowing how income affects food choice is critical to determining the impact of rising incomes, economic development, or income-transfer policies on diets and nutrition. Andrew Muhammad (United States Department of Agriculture) will discuss a unique and comprehensive study that uses actual dietary consumption data to examine individual food intake data across countries and across subgroups within those countries. Results related to the relationships among income and dietary habits of gender and age subgroups across the spectrum of rich and poor countries will provide a foundation for considering interventions that disrupt the normal impact of income elasticities of food consumption in order to improve nutrition outcomes.

Demand for food depends not only on average income and price, but also on short-term fluctuations induced by drought and other shocks. Michael Carter (University of California at Davis) will present ample evidence that such fluctuations can have long-term and irreversible consequences, especially for the health and nutrition of young children. This problem is exacerbated by the tendency of lower-wealth households to hold on to scarce assets in times of crisis, rather than liquidating them in order to sustain food intake in the short-term. This presentation will demonstrate that development strategies which promise “more tomatoes, most of the time” may not suffice to induce farmers to invest in technologies that on average will boost incomes and food availability. Dr. Carter will discuss the vital role risk management technologies must play if agricultural development is to fulfill its potential to improve health and nutrition, and will introduce examples of how these technologies can induce greater investment by farmers and stabilize consumption in the face of climatic shocks.
Can collaboration with the private sector facilitate the application of sophisticated marketing practices and accelerate the achievement of improved nutrition? Marti van Liere (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition) will discuss some of the strengths and gaps in current practices and as well as opportunities for improvement based off evidence from Nutrition Behavior Change Interventions (BCI). Although many BCIs demonstrate impact in limited settings, there is limited evidence for impact at scale, sustainability, or cost-effectiveness. Successful examples include collaboration between Ghana Health Services, UNICEF and Unilever to promote iodized salt and the ongoing work of soap companies with UNICEF, Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) and others to promote hygienic behavior, notably hand-washing with soap. Private sector expertise in formative research, creative design, and implementation strategies may yield insights which can translate into appropriate nutritional messages delivered to the target audience via existing channels. Creative platforms including the use of mobile technology to distribute vouchers for nutritious foods are opportunities currently being explored.

A diet rich in fruits and vegetables improves health, reduces risk of chronic diseases and helps maintain ideal body weight, yet populations around the world eat less than half of the daily amount of fruits and vegetables recommended for good health. Improving nutrition for low-income children and families is a national priority in the United States because increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in this vulnerable population will confer the biggest public health benefit. Lorelei DiSogra (United Fresh Produce Association) will discuss unique opportunities for collaboration and joint action to drive policy, environmental and systems change to increase fruit and vegetables consumption. Her presentation will highlight global examples of where nutrition and produce industry partners have collaborated to build political support to scale up these innovative and effective approaches.