

# Campaign for ethical marketing

January/March 2003



The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that reversing the decline in breastfeeding could save the lives of 1.5 million infants every year, yet baby food companies continue to market artificial foods in ways that undermine breastfeeding. The people responsible have names and addresses. You can help to stop them.

The *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* was adopted as a 'minimum requirement' for all countries by the World Health Assembly (which sets the policy of the World Health Organisation) in 1981. The *International Code* aims to protect breastfeeding by restricting company marketing practices and to ensure breastmilk substitutes are used properly when these are necessary. A number of Resolutions address questions of interpretation and changes in marketing practices and scientific knowledge, and have equal weight to the *International Code*.

## Take action to stop new baby food advertising offensive

**Background:** Trade rules governing the composition and labelling of baby foods will be debated again at international meetings in May and November. These could open the door to a flood of idealizing labels and promotion.

Health claims like those shown in the advertisements on this page, are increasingly being used to sell breastmilk substitutes and foods for young children. In some countries magazines are packed with adverts which make unsubstantiated claims that the products will improve intelligence or boost the immune system.

Resolutions passed by the World Health Assembly - the world's highest health policy setting body - ban all promotion and idealising text and images about breastmilk substitutes. Guidelines also being drafted by the UN body, Codex Alimentarius are calling for no health claims on any foods for infants and young children. WHA Resolution 55.25 also recommends: "*exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life... with nutritionally adequate and safe complementary feeding through introduction of safe and adequate amounts of indigenous foodstuffs and local foods while breastfeeding continues up to the age of two years or beyond.*" It asks governments to ensure that the "*introduction of micronutrient interventions and the marketing of nutritional supplements do not replace, or undermine support for the sustainable practice of, exclusive breastfeeding and optimal complementary feeding.*" These Resolutions are drafted after detailed analysis of scientific evidence: the '6 months' recommendation involved a review of over 3,000 research studies. Governments have a responsibility to implement these policies. Companies, health workers and non-governmental organisations, must also respect and abide by them. The systematic failure of companies to do so is why there are campaigns such as this action sheet.

If countries introduce strong measures to protect health, challenges can be brought before the World Trade Organisation (WTO). A national law banning health claims on baby foods, for example, could be portrayed as an unfair barrier to trade. In such disputes, WTO refers to Codex Standards instead of to WHA Resolutions. This is why the food industry, whose main aim is to expand its market, is so active at Codex meetings.



Dumex promotes its 'maxi-Q' system in Malaysia - or is that Max-IQ?



In Belgium Nestlé claims that "*breastmilk is best and Nestlé research used it as the model to create Nidal Bifidus 2*" which "*simulates the immune system*".



In Malaysia, Mead Johnson claims its Sustagen formulas offer "*Super immunity*" because "*You don't want to worry about what else is crawling around.*"

Our challenge is to ensure that Codex considers health as the highest priority and that the World Health Assembly Resolutions are respected. You can write to your government and elected officials to support this campaign.

**Suggested letter to your President/Prime Minister, Minister of Health, Minister of Trade, Minister of Development. UK addresses c/o House of Commons, London, SW1 0AA.**

I would be grateful if you could tell me the Government's policy regarding the development of Codex Alimentarius Standards on foods for infants and young children. I believe that Codex standards should be in line with the Resolutions adopted by the World Health Assembly, including the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*. Amongst other things, these ban idealizing pictures and text on baby foods and the promotion of complementary foods before 6 months of age.

I would like confirmation that the [UK] Government will support the adoption of Codex Guidelines which ban the use of health claims on foods for infants and young children, and insist that Codex Standards respect the *International Code* and subsequent Resolutions.

## British Medical Journal study blasts marketing violations

**Background:** The British Medical Journal (18th January 2003) has published a study on baby food marketing in Togo and Burkina Faso which finds widespread violations by baby food companies Nestlé, Danone and others.

The monitoring was conducted at the end of 1999 and mid 2000. For publication in the British Medical Journal the research paper was scrutinised by experts - a process known as peer-review. Nestlé, which was found distributing free samples of infant formulas Al-110 and Pregoigoz and producing labels without required warnings amongst other violations, dismissed the findings as old and questioned why they had not been reported to the company. Nestlé ignores the fact that companies are responsible themselves for ensuring that their activities do not violate the marketing requirements. The scientific study was examining whether they are doing so and was conducted with the agreement of the Health Ministries. Violations are routinely reported to companies by groups within the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), but little action is taken unless backed by letter writing campaigns and media exposure.

**Please write to the principle companies highlighted in the research:**

**Peter Brabeck-Letmathe**, CEO, Nestlé S.A., Avenue Nestlé 55, CH-1800 Vevey, Switzerland, Fax: +41 21 924 2813

**Franck Riboud**, CEO, Danone, 7 rue de Teheran, 75381 Paris, France, Fax: +33 1 42 25 67 16

**John R Stafford**, CEO, Wyeth (American Home Products), P.O. Box 8616, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19101, USA  
Fax: +1 610 688 6228

Many thanks to everyone who wrote in support of our campaign to protect the Vietnam regulations from industry pressure - these have been forwarded to the authorities.



**Baby Milk Action coordinates the 20-country international Nestlé boycott which has prompted some improvements to**

**marketing practices. The boycott focuses on Nestlé because it controls about 40% of the world market in baby milks and uses its influence to undermine controls on marketing activities. Monitoring shows Nestlé to be the largest single source of violations worldwide. ⇒ If you are boycotting Nestlé products, such as Nescafé coffee, write and tell Nestlé.**

As you are aware, your company has been found to be violating the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent, relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions in research published in the British Medical Journal (18th January 2003).

Can you explain why your company was violating these requirements, at least up until the time the research was conducted, when you have claimed for many years to abide by the Code? Do you now retract your past assurances?

The type of violations exposed, such as inadequate labeling, indicate a systematic and institutionalised failure of your company to fulfil its obligations. Can you explain what steps you will instigate to ensure that your activities at every level are in line with the provisions of the *International Code* and subsequent, relevant Resolutions?

## Nestlé won't stop promoting whole milks in baby food sections

**Background:** On the April/June 2002 action sheet we highlighted the promotion of Nestlé whole milks (such as Nido and Ninho) in the infant feeding sections of pharmacies and supermarkets.

Nestlé has issued a statement indicating that it will do nothing to stop this practice as it claims that there are no marketing restrictions for whole milks. Write to Peter Brabeck (address on left).

As you are aware, the use of inappropriate whole milks for infant feeding is widespread and dangerous.

As you are also aware, Nestlé whole milks, such as Nido and Ninho, are often promoted alongside more expensive formulas in the 'infant feeding' sections of pharmacies and supermarkets. This encourages poor mothers who have decided or been persuaded to use formula to buy the cheaper whole milk.

You can refer to the picture on page 43 of your own *Sustainability Review* for evidence. This shows your 'auditors' in front of *Nido* in a baby food section in a store in Argentina.

Nestlé's statement on this issue indicates that you will not stop this dangerous practice. This is not only irresponsible, it can be seen as a violation of World Health Assembly Resolution 49.15. This requires: *"that complementary foods are not marketed for or used in ways that undermine exclusive and sustained breastfeeding,"* but by allowing your whole milk to be presented as a cheap alternative to breastmilk and infant formula, you are doing just that.

I request you consider the health of the many infants fed on your whole milk around the world and order Nestlé whole milks to be removed from infant feeding sections.

Join Baby Milk Action to receive our *Update* newsletter. 23 St. Andrew's Street, Cambridge, CB2 3AX.  
£15 waged, £7 unwaged. Tel: (01223) 464420. Fax (01223) 464417. E-mail: [info@babymilkaction.org](mailto:info@babymilkaction.org)  
Baby Milk Action's Web Site is at <http://www.babymilkaction.org/> and includes an on-line shop.

