

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF INFANT FOOD INDUSTRIES

(ICIFI)

FEEDING BABIES IN THE THIRD WORLD

INDUSTRY RESPONDS TO MISINFORMATION

Public Health Experts, Medical Authorities and Nutritionists throughout the world assign the greatest importance to proper feeding of the very young. There is agreement across these professions that the diet with which we begin our life will have a pronounced impact on how we live the rest of it.

ICIFI is an association of infant formula manufacturers whose member companies account for over 85% of the infant formula sold in the developing countries. ICIFI therefore believes that it is well-qualified to address the complex fundamental issues underlying the current controversy about infant feeding practices. This has been caused largely by oversimplification and misrepresentation of the facts by industry critics.

Objective discussion is a prerequisite for sound public policy development. ICIFI members have consulted Health Authorities, Researchers, Doctors and other Health Workers, and above all, Mothers, throughout the world, in making this analysis. We hope that it will be of value to all who share our aim of providing safe and adequate nutrition to children everywhere.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY ABOUT INFANT FORMULA

The mass of materials published by critics of the infant food industry over the past decade, can be summarized in a very few fundamental points. These are "translated" into slogans which are repeated time and again until they appear to be accepted as fact by well-meaning opinion leaders and many persons who have a sincere concern for eliminating the tragedy of malnutrition from the world's poorest nations. The true facts are in complete contradiction with the slogans.

FALSE STATEMENT :

"Less than 1% of Women Cannot Breast Feed."

(This infers that "Breast Milk Substitutes" are needed by less than 1% of mothers. Occasionally critics may admit percentages ranging from 1 to 5%, but no scientific source for the estimate is ever given.)

FACTS :

1. The following facts show that the majority of women need to use a breast milk substitute at some time during the first months of life whether as a supplement or as a replacement for breast milk.
2. It is true that only a small percentage of women are physically incapable of breast feeding (this includes mothers who die in child-birth).
3. Well-nourished mothers can usually breast feed their babies adequately (without supplements) for up to 4 or 6 months.
4. Poorly-nourished mothers (i.e. the majority in poor communities) need to give supplements earlier if growth failure is to be avoided.
5. The earlier supplements are needed, the more necessary it is to give a properly-formulated infant food whose composition approaches that of breast milk.
6. Those mothers who have to work outside the home and cannot take their babies with them must

also introduce breast milk substitutes early if provision for maternity leave is inadequate. These mothers are not included in the "1%" estimate.

7. According to UNESCO estimates up to a third of women are employed outside the home in developing countries.
8. Recent WHO and Industry studies have shown that even in areas where no commercial infant foods are available, up to 30% of mothers give regular supplements in addition to breast feeding by the 2nd month of life.
9. The poorer the community the more likely it is that the breast milk substitutes and supplements used will be indigenous foods often highly unsuitable for young infants.

BABY MILK ACTION COMMENT: The full document is 13-pages.

It is not all included here due to time constraints on scanning it all in.

Similar arguments as appear in the rest of the document continue to be made and have been responded to on the Baby Milk Action website.

To receive a full paper copy of this document, contact Baby Milk Action.