Iodine in food systems and health

First international conference of the World Iodine Association

The World Iodine Association (WIA) held its first conference dedicated to ‘Iodine in Food Systems and Health’ on 15-17 November in Pisa, Italy. Scientists and policy-driven stakeholders attempted to answer an important question: how can iodine content of a healthy diet be optimized to sustainably prevent Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD).

The international conference approached the challenge of IDD prevention from two sides: science- and policy-related. Prof. Pierdomenico Perata, Rector of the Sant’Anna School of Advanced Studies, who hosted the event, called it “an opportunity to increase our understanding about how variations in iodine intake affect human and animal health”, so that IDD can be prevented.

On the policy side, the almost 100-strong audience had an opportunity to learn about conventional as well as novel strategies that can be employed by national governments to sustain optimal iodine intakes. Against this background, the WIA Director General, Mr. Attilio Caligiani, called for a common strategy to tackle Iodine Deficiency Disorders: “In Europe, there are at least ten countries that are considered mildly iodine deficient, including Italy, France, Denmark and Ireland.”

One of the main goals of the WIA conference was to promote a common multi-stakeholder approach toward truly sustainable prevention of iodine deficiency in Europe. “It is our mission to raise awareness among policy-makers about the risks associated with IDD, and to ensure their support in the near future, as well as in the long term. Balanced iodine nutrition needs to be a part of the public health strategic planning for 2020–2024,” concluded Mr. Caligiani.

Iodine: a new perspective
IGN’s Michael Zimmermann (Chair of the Board) and Elizabeth Pearce (Regional Coordinator for North America) gave keynote presentations during the conference’s opening session. Dr. Pearce set the scene with a history of iodine nutrition and thyroid disorders, and the subsequent establishment of salt iodization programs in the U.S. and Switzerland in the 1920s. Prof. Zimmermann followed with an overview of global efforts and progress against iodine deficiency to date.

Speakers in the next session represented a variety of stakeholders: NGOs, doctors’ and patients’ associations, a consumer organization, salt industry, and animal feed industry. While each contributed their unique perspective on iodine nutrition, all recognized the need for concerted action and multi-stakeholder collaboration to bring IDD to the attention of EU policymakers. A session devoted to iodine in soil, water, and atmosphere provided insights on the geochemical processes that contribute to the distribution of iodine in the environment. On the topic of iodine in food and health, the speakers discussed factors that affect the dietary supply of iodine through foods such as iodized salt, milk, and fish; and meeting dietary requirements during pregnancy or when consuming a restricted diet.

A session devoted to iodine monitoring included updates from national IDD prevention programs, a discussion on current biomarkers, and the effects of iodine deficiency and excess on health and cognition. Crop biofortification was discussed as a relatively new but promising solution to iodine deficiency in specific settings.

About WIA
The World Iodine Association (WIA) is an international non profit organisation that represents iodine producers, processors, distributors and end users in relevant industry and government bodies. WIA membership is also composed of companies and members not involved in the industry, such as non-profit organizations and civil societies working on iodine projects relevant to their scientific interests. Among WIA’s goals is to provide information about the purposes, uses and applications of iodine and its derivatives and help eliminate iodine deficiency worldwide.

Read more: www.worldiodineassociation.com