ILSI SOUTHEAST ASIA REGION

Improving Nutrition and Food Safety for Public Health

ILSI Southeast Asia Region

ILSI Southeast Asia Region (ILSI SEA Region) is a regional branch of ILSI that covers a large and diverse geographical area that includes the ASEAN countries, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Headquartered in Singapore, ILSI SEA Region initiates and co-ordinates scientific programs, research, as well as knowledge and information dissemination throughout Southeast Asia and Australasia.

ILSI SEA Region oversees a Country Office in Australia, as well as Country Committees in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. We also serve as coordinator for collaborative programs among ILSI's Asian branches (ILSI Focal Point in China, ILSI India, ILSI Japan, ILSI Korea and ILSI Taiwan).

OUR MISSION TO ADVANCE SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

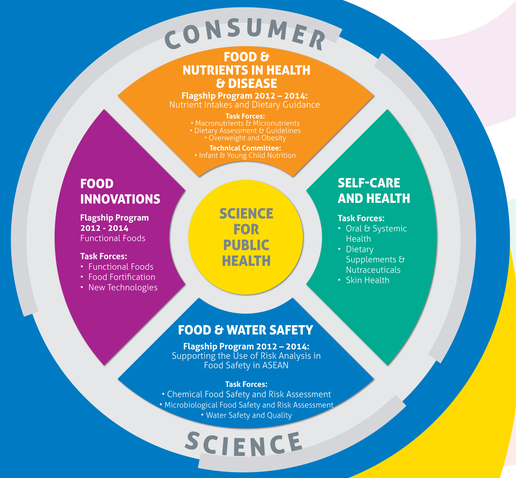
With 2 decades of scientific undertakings, ILSI SEA Region's mission is to improve scientific knowledge and understanding in areas related to nutrition, food safety, and health. By building a strong network of partnerships with many institutions and organizations, ILSI SEA Region remains committed to bringing cutting-edge science for public health impact in the region. We continue to strengthen our scientific resources by collaborating with leading scientists, research organizations and academic institutions in our region and globally.

SCIENTIFIC STRATEGIES AND PROGRAM

ILSI SEA Region's core strategy for maximizing our impact on public health is to:

- **Share** new scientific knowledge and research in nutrition and food safety
- **Develop** capabilities in the region for science-based decision making
- **Foster** harmonization in a diverse region, and
- **Support** community health programs and research.

These strategies are pursued through our Scientific Program, which is organized and facilitated through our Science Clusters and Task Forces:



Each of the Science Clusters covers a wide range of scientific issues and public health challenges. Scientific projects, activities and programs that address these challenges are carried out through our Task Forces. To maximize our impact and strengthen our leadership role in strategic and/or emerging areas, ILSI SEA Region has also identified Flagship Programs with 2- or 3-year framework of objectives, outputs and outcomes, within each of our Science Clusters.

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In addition, a panel of experts serves as advisors to the Scientific Clusters and Task Forces under which the branch's programs operate.

MEMBERS 2013 - 2014

- Abbott Manufacturing Singapore Pte Ltd
- Ajinomoto Co, Inc, ASEAN Regional Headquarters
- Almond Board of California
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- Nutrition Strategies International
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- Unilever GCEA-NZ
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HIGHLIGHTS OF 2013 ACTIVITIES

NUTRITION

HEALTHY AGING STRATEGIES FOR ASIA AND AUSTRALASIA

With widespread demographic changes taking place in Asia and Australasia, rapid population aging presents unique challenges to government policy makers and health care professionals. To explore the science and linkages between nutrition, physical activity and healthy aging, ILSI SEA Region organized a conference on "**Healthy Aging in Asia: Strategies to Meet Health and Lifestyle Challenges**" held in Singapore in March 2013, and a symposium on "**Optimum Health and Nutrition for an Aging Population**" held in Melbourne, Australia in October 2012.

The symposium in Australia was co-organized with The Omega-3 Centre, and highlighted key issues affecting nutrition for the elderly. It also provided an update on the latest science on nutrition and aging, shared recommendations for future research as well as action by industry and government to help address these issues.

The conference in Singapore was jointly organized with the Singapore Health Promotion Board, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) of Australia. The 2-day conference presented current scientific findings on diet, nutrition and longevity; discussed the health status of the elderly in selected Asian countries; shared international and regional experience on programs and research into aging; and identified effective nutrition and health strategies and best practices to promote healthy aging.

MICRONUTRIENT FORTIFICATION OF FOODS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH IN ASIA

Micronutrient deficiencies continue to present a significant challenge to public health throughout Asia, particularly in vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and young children. The fortification of common foodstuffs with micronutrients is an on-going strategy to address this public health concern. With evolving regulations and technologies surrounding fortification, there is wide diversity in fortification levels, food vehicles, and level of regulatory control. In addition, the actual status of micronutrient deficiencies in some Asian countries is not well-established.

To address these issues, ILSI SEA Region co-organized a parallel symposium session "**Micronutrient Fortification: Science and Strategies for Public Health Improvement in Asia**" in September 2013 at the International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) in Granada, Spain. The session featured case studies in large-scale food fortification from Vietnam, Philippines and Cambodia, and provided the opportunity to share scientific outcomes, lessons learnt on administrative policy, and business strategy adopted by the stakeholders to achieve the common goal of public health improvement. The session was supported by ILSI SEA Region, ILSI Japan Centre for Health Promotion, ILSI Focal Point in China, and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

ILSI SEA Region also organized a **Regional Conference on Micronutrient Fortification of Food** held in Bangkok, Thailand in October 2013 to provide an update on micronutrient deficiency in Southeast Asia, and to address issues related to the micronutrient fortification of foods, including benefits and regulatory considerations. The conference was organized in collaboration with the Food Science and Technology Association of Thailand (FoSTAT), and discussed future strategies to address micronutrient deficiency in Asia.

FOOD SAFETY

ASEAN FOOD CONSUMPTION DATA AND EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT

Following the earlier workshop held in 2011, ILSI SEA Region in collaboration with the Food Safety and Quality Division, Ministry of Health, Malaysia and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), organized the '**2nd Workshop on ASEAN Food Consumption Data and Exposure Assessment**' in November 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This workshop is part of the work of the ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety (AEGFS) Project on "Strengthening ASEAN Risk Assessment Capacities: Food Consumption Data". The Project aims to develop an ASEAN Food Consumption Database, which could be used for dietary exposure assessment purposes for both food safety and nutrition. Technical representatives from all 10 ASEAN Member States, as well as the ASEAN Secretariat participated in the workshop, which was facilitated by experts from FAO and WHO. At the end of the workshop, agreement was obtained for a harmonized format for the ASEAN Food Consumption Database to collate available national food consumption data. The format is also harmonized with WHO/FAO requirements so that it could easily be used for international risk assessment purposes. Once compilation of the consumption data into the ASEAN Food Consumption Database is complete, it will be provided to the ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre (ARAC) for future risk assessment applications.

MANAGEMENT OF ALLERGENS IN THE FOOD CHAIN

Food allergies are increasingly being recognized globally as an important public health concern, including in Southeast Asia. In view of the need to address this issue, ILSI SEA Region supported a session on '**Managing Allergens in the Food Chain**' at the 13th ASEAN Food Conference, which was held in Singapore in September 2013. Among the highlights of the session was the review shared by Dr. Lee Bee Wah from the National University of Singapore on the prevalence of food allergies in the Southeast Asian region. In contrast to Western populations, peanut allergies are rare in Southeast Asia while allergies to shellfish are much more common. This is in part due to cross-reactivity from the inhalation of dust mite allergens, which is common due to hot and humid climatic conditions. In addition, Ms. Kirsten Grinter from the Allergen Bureau in Australia also shared updates on ongoing initiatives being undertaken by the food industry in Australia to support decision making on allergen labeling through the 'Voluntary Incidental Trace Allergen Labeling' (VITAL) program. The VITAL program is underpinned by scientific risk assessment to determine thresholds for different types of food allergens, which are subsequently used to set action levels to guide the need for trace allergen labeling. Due to its effectiveness, similar approaches may one day be rolled out in other regions including Southeast Asia to manage allergens in the food chain.