Harmonised procedures for producing new data on the nutritional composition of ethnic foods

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Food composition databases provide important data that can be used in a variety of ways to improve the nutritional quality of food and the health of the populations. The multicultural nature of European populations, together with increased travel and the globalisation of the food supply, has led to an increase in the consumption of ethnic foods by both mainstream and ethnic populations. However, the information that is available on the composition of ethnic foods is currently incomplete and fragmentary which both prevents effective health and disease interventions and limits the provision of dietary advice and information. One of the aims of the ethnic foods work package within the European Commission's FP6 Network of Excellence EuroFIR is the provision of new and reliable data on the nutritional composition of ethnic foods from seven EU Member States and Israel for inclusion in national food composition databases. To achieve this goal, specific standards and mechanisms were developed to sample and analyse foods to harmonise procedures. Given the anticipated usage of the data it was essential that they were representative of the foods consumed in the country or region and that proper sampling procedures of the foods were employed. The most important nutrients were prioritised and analysed by selected accredited laboratories. The analytical methods selected were appropriate to fulfil the requirements of the resulting data. Quality assurance measures (ISO 17025, CRMs, IQC) were in place and the data accurately reflected the composition of chosen foods. This paper describes the procedures for producing validated new data for inclusion in forthcoming publications.

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