

New UN declaration must protect rights of the world's poorest to nutritional benefits of milk and meat, say experts

More than 115 experts are calling for animal-source foods to be excluded from a UN declaration to eliminate trans-fatty acids.

NAIROBI, KENYA, July 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A draft UN [declaration](#) to eliminate trans-

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*Namukolo Covic, ILRI's
Director General's
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fatty acids from global diets risks inadvertently denying the world's poorest the nutritional benefits of milk and meat, experts have said.

A new declaration to reduce non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like heart disease and diabetes proposes to eliminate all trans-fatty acids from global diets.

However, while research shows that industrially produced trans-fatty acids contribute to NCDs, those found naturally in animal-source foods at low levels are not harmful and may even offer health-protecting benefits, such as [preventing type two diabetes](#).

Writing in an open letter to UN negotiators, more than 115 signatories from Africa, Europe and the Americas said: “The risk of a blanket commitment to eliminate all trans-fatty acids is that it unnecessarily discourages the consumption of highly nutritious dairy, meat and other animal-source foods. And once again, the burden will fall heaviest on low- and middle-income countries, where nutrient-rich meat, milk and dairy are already under-consumed.”

The letter, which was coordinated by the Nairobi-based International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), was endorsed by the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR). It was also signed by experts representing the UN Committee on World Food Security, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP).

NCDs disproportionately impact developing countries, where obesity and diet-related disease in adulthood are closely linked to undernutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. In 2023, one

in every five Africans faced hunger and around a third of children under five were affected by stunting.

Animal-source foods like meat and milk are energy-dense and a rich source of high-quality proteins and micronutrients, including Vitamins A and B12, riboflavin, calcium, zinc and iodine. Research has found that a child who drinks milk daily can grow [up to three per cent](#) more in a month than a child who does not, yet average annual milk consumption can be as low as just 1kg per person per year in some developing countries.

“A single glass of milk is among the most affordable, nutrient-rich foods available — milk has been shown to reduce stunting in children and lessen the burden of hunger,” said Namukolo Covic, nutrition expert and ILRI’s Director General’s Representative to Ethiopia.

“Industrially-produced trans-fatty acids come from food processing, a sector that is still in its infancy in many African countries. These countries have the opportunity to create a new food future as their food systems transform. These food systems must transform towards eliminating industrially derived trans-fat.”

The draft resolution is currently under review with member states with a final draft due to be presented for endorsement at the UN General Assembly in September.

In the meantime, countries will gather in New York from July 14 to 23 for the UN’s High-Level Political Forum, which will assess progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) among others.

“The contribution of animal-source foods to trans-fatty acids is very low compared to industrially derived trans-fats and should be weighed against their contributions to nutrient density, given their nutritional benefits even in small quantities,” said Ruth Oniang’o, Professor in Food Science and Nutrition and Editor-in-Chief of the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development.

“For people in low-income settings, animal-source foods are often the only reliable and available source of essential nutrients, we need a nuanced approach supported by sustainability solutions.

“UN negotiators must ensure this resolution recognises the distinction between the large amounts of trans-fats of industrial origin and the low levels naturally occurring in animal-source foods.”

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