



10 Minutes For The Planet

“5-a-day” But What About The Quality...©

by Valentine Rinner

Hello everyone and welcome to this week’s episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet.

We are all familiar with the “5-a-day” slogan, inviting us to eat more fruit and vegetables, or with little indications explaining not to “eat too much salt, sugar and fat,” on ironically, very salty, sugary and fatty food advertisements. Those legal recommendations and legislation are based on research done by the Ministry of Health, and more specifically, by the French National Sanitary Security Agency.

These rules for the French population are regularly updated, and in late January of this year, the agency newly revised their official indications for food consumption. This detailed report sets new foundations and recommendations for all national nutritional campaigns and it also has a considerable impact on what the country eats as a whole, immediately influencing school canteens and other institutional cafeterias, for example.

So just what are the big changes the government has in store for us in 2017?

A key evolution is their recommendation for a higher consumption of wholegrain cereals and leguminous plants, such as lentils and beans, which were previously considered a part of the carbohydrate category. Also, for the very first time, the agency has fixed a recommended limit on the consumption of red meat and charcuterie: a weekly limit of 500 grams for red meat and 25 grams for charcuterie.

Surprisingly, several aspects of nutrition are still completely missing from the official report. I will mention five. The first one is food quality. Indeed, the recommendations set very specific quantities, however, there is not a single mention of quality. For the government, a potato is a potato and a tomato is a tomato.

This is tied to the second aspect of nutrition neglected in the report, which is the mode of production. As a matter of fact, an organic fruit typically has higher nutritional properties than a conventional one, mainly because it takes longer to develop and mature, while conventional agriculture will accelerate the production.

This issue brings up the third nutritional aspect omitted by the report, which is to mention the environmental impact of what’s on our plates. There is no mention of differences between organic versus conventional foods, but also no mention of the impact of intensity, seasonality or location of production.

A fourth nutritional aspect omitted in the report, which in my opinion, is very worthy of

a mention, is how we eat. Everyone knows that when we eat in front of the television, for instance, we won't assimilate food the same way as if we were eating on-the-go in the streets, or if we were sitting and chatting with other people.

The last nutritional aspect omitted in the report relates to the quality of food, the first aspect I mentioned, and that is about processed food. There is no mention of processed food in the official national indications for food consumption, which is incredibly surprising given that processed food now represents 80% of our national diet and that its nutritional impact is very seriously questioned by the scientific and medical community.

It seems like our government hasn't quite yet transitioned to the Twenty-First Century. Bye everyone and see you next week for a new episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet.