

EVENT SUMMARY - 3rd May 2019

Last month, the Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership (VSRP) brought together over 60 food industry delegates at the launch of “*Reformulation Readiness: A best practice guide to salt reformulation for Australian manufacturers*”. The event was held at the impressive Victorian Government Investment Centre, with 360-degree views of Melbourne on 3 May 2019. A great mix of food manufacturing industry, public health representatives and nutrition students took part in the event and we’ve summarised here some of the key take-aways and learnings:

- Libbi Gorr was inspiring as the MC and panel moderator, motivating the delegates in her inimitable and passionate style to take personal responsibility and recognise the progress that food manufacturers have taken over the years to make our processed foods healthier. She outlined the dominant narrative for the session is all about *recognising, supporting and working with* the food manufacturing industry to do more, together in cooperation.
- Kellie-Ann Jolly, CEO Heart Foundation Victoria, also stressed in her opening remarks that the food manufacturing industry plays a vital role, and we need to keep working together in collaboration. She recognised that Australians are eating too much salt and we need to do something about it because of the health implications - like heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. She officially launched the new “how to guide” to demonstrate that support and assistance is available to help food manufacturers to innovate and reformulate. Kellie-Ann emphasised the guide is the first of its kind in Australia and has been developed by the VSRP to directly respond to industry feedback for better information on best practice approaches to reformulation.



Pictured from L to R at the launch: Kirstan Corben, Executive Manager, Programs, VicHealth; Elizabeth Joldeski, Food Industry Liaison, Heart Foundation; Clare Farrand, Senior Project Manager Salt Reduction Strategies, The George Institute for Global Health; Vanessa Clarkson, Registered Nutritionist, author of “Reformulation Readiness How to Guide”; Sharon Laurence, State Public Health Nutritionist, Department of Health & Human Services; Libbi Gorr, MC & Panel Moderator; Terry Ryan, Managing Director, Barilla Australia; Kellie-Ann Jolly, CEO Heart Foundation, Victoria.

Next up, Libbi moderated an expert food industry and public health panel, discussing reformulation in great detail, and from a variety of perspectives. The core themes included:

- Clare Farrand, Senior Public Health Nutritionist with The George Institute provided an international perspective advising that the World Health Organisation recommends 5 grams of salt per day, but in Australia we are eating nearly double this amount. This is affecting our health, and most of the salt we eat is in the processed food we are increasingly buying. She emphasised that the new “how to guide” is a very useful tool as it will help food manufacturers greatly, as the challenge is to know where to begin, and this guide is a great place to start.

- Terry Ryan, Managing Director Barilla spoke about Barilla’s commitment to delivering on taste and quality but not compromising on healthy food production. Barilla has reformulated close to 1,000 recipes over the last decade. The salt in their olive pasta sauce has been gradually reduced so it’s not noticed, step by step. He recommended to bring the salt down slowly, for companies to engage in sensory testing, market testing and critically, you need to allow consumers time to get used to the new taste profile. Barilla has successfully reduced 50% of the salt in their olive pasta sauce and at the same time, sugar content has also been reduced.
- As the panel session played out, interaction with the audience via Slido questions drilled down into questions about why “reformulation” and “salt reduction” are not buzzwords in the community, like sugar reduction, for instance.
- Vanessa Clarkson spoke about the perception that if you’re removing salt (and even sugar), it won’t taste as good. But she advised that this isn’t necessarily true, especially when blind sensory testing is undertaken. Further, talking about reformulation may not necessarily be a beneficial selling point to the consumer, except perhaps in some food categories where a health claim is important. Reformulation is an important element of responsible business practice, it should be inherent that companies produce healthy foods as this is what consumers expect and demand from food manufacturers today.
- Terry Ryan agreed, suggesting reformulation is not so much a “sales” or a “marketing” point but manufacturers need to respond to consumer demand for cleaner, more sustainable and healthier processed foods. Terry further advised the food manufacturers in the audience that reformulation is a journey - it should be seen as a continuous program, and cautioned companies not to rest on their laurels, because someone else will supersede you. Finally, there was a call for greater collaboration between industry, government and public health bodies working together to tackle the broader issue around better dietary outcomes and healthy diets.
- Sharon Laurence, State Public Health Nutritionist with the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services further emphasised the complexity of tackling the healthy eating issue. She noted that reformulation, whilst important, is part of a mix of things which government and policy makers need to consider. These strategies include consumer education around better food choices, portion sizes, kilojoule content marketing etc - and governments need to look at influencing change across all of these areas. If you manufacture, supply or retail food, there’s support available in addition to the new how to guide - initiatives such as the Healthy Eating Advisory Service, Food Checker are other important tools that can help.



- Vanessa Clarkson, the author of the “how to guide”, invited attendees to use the new tool and implement the nine step process as a part of their reformulation strategies. She advised the guide brings to the fore all of the elements that food manufacturers need to consider when embarking on reformulation and noted that whilst the guide is targeting small and medium companies, even some of the big manufacturers will learn something new. Vanessa firmly believes it’s time that reformulation “*Just needs to be imbedded so it’s done*”, and we aren’t here talking about it in a few years’ time.

Kirstan Corben, Executive Manager Programs with VicHealth wrapped up the panel, thanking them all for their contribution and stimulating discussion and introduced the final part of the event, where everyone moved into an expo style networking session. Attendees had the unique chance to speak directly with food manufacturers to learn about their salt reformulation journeys. A big thank you to Terry Ryan (Barilla), Natalie Chong (Woolworths), Wendy Jeffrey (PepsiCo), Megan Nader & Margaret Stuart (Nestle) and Gina Levy (Kellogg’s) for taking part in the expo and sharing their stories, progress and samples of reformulated products. These examples and shared stories clearly demonstrated that salt reformulation can be successfully achieved. A resources and grants table with the Food Innovation Network, FIAL and the Heart Foundation Unpack the Salt team also took questions on support for food manufacturers.



Thank you all once again for coming to the launch of our Reformulation Readiness how to guide. Following event feedback, it’s clear that there’s strong support for the development of the guide and you would like to explore some of the questions that were raised on the day like: *How do you go about setting targets? Which approach to reformulation should you adopt? What are the impacts on shelf life?*

The Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership is committed to continuing to help food manufacturers with salt reformulation and are pleased to respond to this extra demand for more information.

We are planning a follow up live webinar session which will take food manufacturers through the nine steps in the reformulation how to guide in greater detail - with the author Vanessa Clarkson. Stay tuned for more details on the webinar – which will be taking place late July.

Lets keep working together to #unpackthesalt and provide a healthier food supply for all Australians.