

Action brief

Development and generation of food systems-based dietary guidelines in Costa Rica

© FAO

Country: Costa Rica

Topics: Nutrition specific interventions

Date: October 2022



Overview



Costa Rica's Food Systems-Based Dietary Guidelines (*FBDGs – Guas Alimentarias Basadas en Sistemas Alimentarios*, or GABSA in Spanish) are national documents that aim to provide specific recommendations on healthy and sustainable food and lifestyles for the country's population. They serve as the basis for national food and nutrition education programmes and policies, as well as cross-cutting issues involving a multiplicity of actors, such as governance, sustainable development, gender equity and continuous improvement.

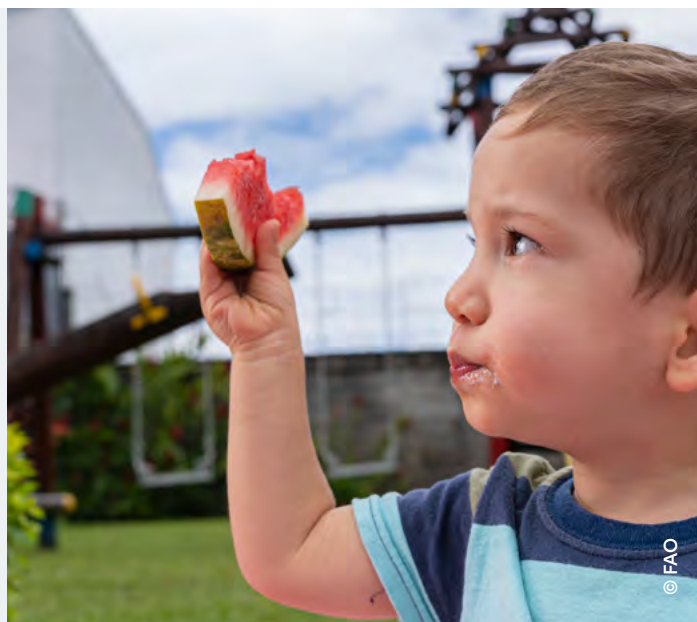
The Ministry of Health, together with the Intersectoral Commission on Dietary Guidelines (CIGA) and with

technical support from the FAO, have implemented an evidence-based methodology that allows nutrition and health priorities to be integrated with the national context of food systems, providing multilevel and nutritional technical recommendations aimed at the various sectors and actors in the food system.

In Costa Rica, the GABSA for the population older than 2 years of age are aimed at addressing the main problems afflicting the population: overweight, obesity, diabetes mellitus, cancer and cardiovascular diseases, particularly hypertension. In addition, they have a food systems approach that allows for a comprehensive approach to all aspects concerned with food, from the agrifood production chain to the consumer, so they contribute to establishing a basis for public policies related to food and nutrition that can be developed by the various sectors in the institutional system. The GABSA guidelines are expected to be used in health promotion and non-communicable disease prevention by various sectors, including public and private. As general objectives, the GABSA guidelines seek to:



- Offer simple and feasible nutritional recommendations with a focus on sustainable food systems for the population older than 2 years of age in Costa Rica.
- Guide consumers in the selection and adoption of eating habits that contribute to leading a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.
- Direct nutritional education for the population older than 2 years of age in Costa Rica.
- Promote adequate nutrition and non-communicable disease prevention among the population older than 2 years of age in Costa Rica.



© FAO



Objectives of the action brief

- The GABSA, with a food systems approach, are a national tool developed inter-institutionally to provide food and nutritional recommendations as well as practical advice to the population, with the aim of promoting a healthy and sustainable lifestyle from a nutritional, environmental, economic, social and cultural point of view.
- It is worth noting the importance of starting the GABSA for the most sensitive, priority and vulnerable population — infants in the first 1,000 days of life — and then moving on to those older than 2.
- The proposed food systems approach is a breakthrough and reflects the global need to realign the food system to a fairer, healthier and more sustainable one that includes actions such as shortening the supply chain, raising consumer awareness to revalue local products and fostering state articulation, among others.
- The intersectorality and integration of sectors – culture, agriculture, health and academics – is fundamental. The evolution of intersectorality within the government is evident with the concept of public health.



Period covered

The preparation and creation of the dietary guidelines for those older than 2 began in August 2021 with the formation of the Intersectoral Commission and ended with its launch on World Food Day, 16 October 2022. The process of updating the Food Systems-Based Dietary Guidelines began in June 2019 with the development of the GABSA for the first 1,000 days of life, funded by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Pooled Fund.



© FAO



What action was taken?

An adaptation of the methodology proposed by FAO was used to develop the GABSA for the population older than 2 years of age, using different reports.

The process began with a definition of the background points:

- reviewing the country's food and nutrition policies;
- mapping decision makers and entry points;
- involving the ministry or lead agency;
- gaining multisectoral acceptance;
- developing a strategy to engage other actors;
- defining the necessary inputs, roles and deadlines; and
- defining initial goals and objectives for the Food-Based Dietary Guidelines.

The food and nutrition situation analysis for the population older than 2 years of age includes the following steps:

1. identifying health and nutrition problems;
2. describing the food and its relationship with epidemiological problems;
3. describing the food system situation;
4. quantifying the diet;
5. identifying technical recommendations: defining nutritional and multilevel technical recommendations and adapting messages for the adult and adolescent population; and
6. identifying and characterizing the legal market and policies related to food and food systems in Costa Rica.

A multisectoral action plan for the implementation of the Food Systems-Based Dietary Guidelines 2023–2028 was prepared by the Intersectoral Commission on Dietary Guidelines. This instrument will make it possible to coordinate national efforts regarding the use of GABSA recommendations thanks to a political and technical reference framework. Several indicators will be used to monitor the implementation of the recommendations at the national level.



What would the country do differently?

While the process has been considered a success, and a participatory approach was deployed, there are some things that could have been done differently, such as:

- Including political leaders. Technician articulation was easy. More lobbying is needed to assimilate the issue and back it up politically, thereby ensuring continuity.
- Knowledge socialization among the consultants constructing the guidelines, as there should be familiarization with the methodology and criteria. It is essential to have a capacity-building approach, especially in public institutions. The institution's team of people also should be integrated.
- Achieve the commitment of institutions so that the GABSA are included in institutional operational programmes.

In terms of challenges:

- Criticism scenarios could be technically anticipated.
- The continuity of the implementation should be ensured with changes to the technical bodies.
- The experience of knowledge management and intersectoral work should continue.
- Plan assessment and monitoring should continue.





Adaptation and applicability

- It is important to follow a methodology and adapt it to the local context, taking cultural relevance into account.
- Likewise, there should be a diverse team that can work on the process. Establish a work plan and calendar and set the frequency of meetings.
- Formalize the processes. In the case of the GABSA, there is a committee of officially appointed experts.
- It is essential to involve top leaders in the process.
- Have a clear vision for moving forward. Work with openness and clarity so as not to lose focus on providing access to healthy nutrition for the population.
- The big challenge in the end is implementation. That is why this work must be accompanied by a good outreach campaign and communication with the same message. If you get everyone to adhere to same message, the power is enormous.

Regarding the essential factors, it is important to consider:

- The scale at the national level and the territorialization, as well as the consultations that took place in the regions.
- The active participation of public and private sector actors is required to construct, implement and assess the GABSA, as well as backing from the principles laid out in the national and international regulatory framework, including legislation, policies, programmes and related projects.
- The promotion of the systemic intervention approach for the GABSA, which aims to give an idea of the systemic and holistic approach that the national development process must consider, entailing the possibility of addressing a certain reality as a whole, considering its components and the various states of interaction among them.





Next steps

- It is imperative to follow up on the Multisectoral Action Plan for the implementation of the Food Systems-Based Dietary Guidelines 2023–2028, considering the four strategic pillars of the plan: governance, collaborative work, knowledge generation and transfer, and monitoring and assessment.
- Cover the missing age range of the school and preschool population.
- Plan and ensure the allocation of resources to fund GABSA advocacy campaigns.
- Promote a national campaign with regional, municipal and local outreach components.
- Continue preparing the manual for facilitators, including dissemination to health educators.
- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy aimed at government leaders to promote the GABSA.



© FAO



Further information



<https://www.ministeriodesalud.go.cr/guiasalimentarias/>

These guidelines are the result of coordinated effort among various institutions working to improve the country's nutrition, such as the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), the Costa Rican Institute for Research and Education on Nutrition and Health (INCIENSA), the National Directorate of the Centres for Education, Nutrition and Comprehensive Child Care (CEN-CINAI), the University of Costa Rica (UCR), the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), the Ministry of Culture and Youth, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) and the SUN Movement.

 **Scaling Up
NUTRITION**

ENGAGE • INSPIRE • INVEST

Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
c/o SUN Movement Secretariat
Villa Le Bocage, Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland
+41 (0) 22 917 7283
info@scalingupnutrition.org
www.scalingupnutrition.org