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Why is Food as Medicine so important?

Our country faces a national health and nutrition crisis. Diet related disease is a leading driver of healthcare costs. COVID provided an unfortunate but needed spotlight on the health issues facing this country particularly within certain populations who have lacked access to proper health care and face health disparities on a daily basis. The concept of Food as Medicine has been around for thousands of years; however, with the renewed interest in preventative approaches, as well the impact of diet related disease, we have seen a growing interest in driving this approach forward to

create real change in not only our approach to healthcare, but also our food system. We know that dietary habits impact disease risk, treatment, and outcome. An emerging but compelling body of research indicates evidence-based food and nutrition interventions integrated into an improved healthcare system may be associated with improved health outcomes and reduced healthcare usage and costs. Multiple sectors have important roles to play and now is the time for all of us to act to improve the future of our country.

What is Unilever's vision in this space and what will the next few years hold?

Conflicting and contradictory health issues – like malnourishment and obesity on the one hand, and social and environmental issues like food poverty and food waste on the other – are part of a complex, interdependent system. And they're all issues that need to be addressed. Unilever is working with governments, NGOs and others to fix these issues.

For the past decade, we've been improving our foods and beverages through our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP). The Plan concluded in 2020, when we achieved our ambition of doubling the proportion of products meeting our [Highest Nutritional Standards](#). These are based on

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globally recognized dietary recommendations and 61% of our Foods portfolio has attained these standards. Through the USLP we made great strides in reducing the calories, sugar and salt in our products. We're continuing this reformulation strategy: by 2022 we're aiming for 70% of our foods to meet these WHO-aligned standards.

Building on this we have a commitment focused on [Positive Nutrition](#). As part of this new commitment, we've launched our [Future Foods](#) ambitions to help people eat healthier diets and to help reduce the environmental impact of the global food chain. We're helping millions of people to eat better, by offering affordable and healthier foods and beverages, and encouraging them to cook with healthy recipes. By offering more plant-based foods and meat and dairy alternatives, we're also helping people to eat more nutritious ingredients like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and legumes. We're providing micronutrients through more fortification of

our products, and increasing our ambition in reducing salt, sugar and calories. Through our recent Positive Nutrition strategy and goals, we have made a number of commitments which will not only help people transition towards healthier diets, but also help reduce the environmental impact of the global food chain.

What is the biggest limiting factor holding back Food as Medicine from reaching its full potential?

I do not believe there is one big factor, but numerous limiting factors which impede not only the science and advancement of policy, but ultimately the translation of the science to meaningful communications and recommendations to consumers. Multiple levers need to be activated for this concept to truly come to life in the marketplace that would improve public health.

More specifically from my perspective, we need to advance our public health recommendations to recognize the importance of bioactive components in the diet, such as flavonoids. Over the last few years, the evidence has mounted on the importance of these components in disease prevention, as well as supporting overall health. However, our government policies and public health recommendations continue to focus on recognized food groups

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Economic Forum (WEF) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development. In addition, as part of the [Sustainable Food Policy Alliance](#), we are partners with the Tufts Food and Nutrition Innovation Council. As part of this Council, I serve on the Food as Medicine working group to further advance this work.

and essential nutrients. In 2017, The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicines took a positive step forward with releasing a report, entitled “Guiding Principles for Developing Dietary Reference Intakes Based on Chronic Disease.” We need to continue to advance the field by acting on these principles in developing public recommendations and possibly Dietary Reference Intakes on bioactive components like flavonoids.

Is multi-stakeholder collaboration key in advancing this space?

Absolutely. We cannot work in silos but need to collaborate to address a total foods systems approach. [We want to see the global food system transformed.](#) We’re working with partners to develop science-based targets, technical solutions and policy at a national and global level, and the transformation has already begun. For example, we’re partnering to help make the UN Food System Summit 2021 a success by seconding resources to the World

What are you most looking forward to at the Food as Medicine Summit?

I am looking forward to participating and hearing how companies and organizations are addressing this critical topic. No one organization can act alone, but rather with our collective efforts we can start to create real change for the improvement of public health. With COVID impacting all of us globally, we are at a pivotal moment in history to build momentum to develop and implement lasting positive public health change. The time is ripe to act.

You can hear more from Joy Dubost on Day 1 of the inaugural Food as Medicine Summit this May 25-26th, EST Timezone. Joy will be participating in the interactive Panel Discussion with Open Q&A titled “How and Why Should We Transition to a Food as Medicine Approach?” alongside representatives from Geisinger, Kroger Health, Danone and PepsiCo.