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***Functional Foods and Natural Health Products Regulations, Policies and R&D
in Canada and Around the World***

Stavroula Malla¹, Jill Hobbs², Eric Kofi Sogah¹

¹University of Lethbridge, ²University of Saskatchewan

As the population ages, and with increasingly sedentary lifestyles, the growing burden of health care costs remains a key policy issue for Canada and for other developed countries with publicly funded health care systems. While many factors contribute to the general health of the population, there is increasing recognition among health professionals, policymakers and consumers, of the link between diet and health. Recent policy responses have included measures to better inform consumers about the nutrient content of foods to facilitate healthier eating choices, for example, the introduction of mandatory nutrition labeling on pre-packaged foods in Canada in 2005, and the requirement to label the presence of trans-fats in these foods. Enhancing the information to consumers is an important policy response to improving health through changing what Canadians eat. Furthermore, there are a lot of policy implications with respect to the regulatory environment for approval of new functional/healthier foods and natural health products and the current labeling regulations for health claims on food and natural health products.

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies nutrition as a significant and manageable determinant of chronic disease, stressing the need for a shift in nutrient intake towards 'healthier' foods. The incidence and severity of many major diseases such as diabetes, coronary heart disease, and cancer are affected by diet. It is estimated that these four dietary-related diseases accounted for \$29.4 billion of direct and indirect health care costs in 1993 (2004 dollars) or 19% of Canadian health care costs. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada also suggests that 60% of adults in Canada are overweight or obese. Recent innovations in the agricultural and food sector have produced functional foods with the potential to reduce the risk of major diseases.

By examining functional foods and natural health products regulations, policies and R&D in Canada and around the World, this project will help broaden our understanding of this important sector; as well as allow us to compare and contrast different policies and regulations around the World; and finally, make public policy recommendations that could improve Canadians' well being and increase social welfare. If successful policies from other countries can be adopted, this will accelerate and foster innovation in the sector. The growing burden of health care cost remains a key policy issue in Canada. Hence, the potential effects on public health care costs of increasing the consumption of functional/healthier foods in diets is of major policy relevance.

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