

### **Regulatory limits for food additives reviewed regularly (The Straits Times, 26 May 2023)**

We refer to the letter, “Beware long-term effects of food substitutes” (May 20), by Mr Sum Kam Weng.

He referred to the World Health Organisation (WHO) report on artificial sweeteners being linked to a higher risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and asked if food additives such as colouring agents, food essences, stabilisers and coagulants are good for health over the long term.

Food additives are chemical ingredients that are added to food, typically in very small amounts, to provide nutrition, colour, flavour or texture. All food additives must be approved by the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) before they can be allowed for use in food sold in Singapore.

In addition, all additives and ingredients used in foods must be stated clearly on food labels to enable consumers to make informed decisions on their choice of food. To protect consumer health, the levels of permitted food additives used must also be within the maximum levels allowed under the food regulations.

SFA has also established a food sampling and testing programme to ensure compliance with these regulations.

SFA regularly reviews the regulatory limits for food additives. When doing so, it takes reference from studies published by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives, which is an international scientific expert panel that advises the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and WHO.

Potential health effects from long-term consumption of food additives are estimated by the joint expert committee based on scientific evidence such as toxicological studies, and are considered by regulators such as SFA when setting regulatory limits.

While WHO’s recent report said that there may be potential undesirable effects from long-term consumption of sweetening agents based on a review of observational studies, it also qualified that the scientific evidence suggesting these effects is very low to low in certainty.

SFA will continue to keep abreast of the latest developments and update regulatory limits for food additives to ensure food safety. More information on food additives can be found on our website (<https://www.sfa.gov.sg/food-information/risk-at-a-glance/food-additives-are-they-safe>).

**Low Teng Yong**

**Acting Director, Risk Assessment and Communications Department**

**National Centre for Food Science**

**Singapore Food Agency**

## Replies

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