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NEWS RELEASE

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Virtual FAO webinar on the design and analysis of the first national individual food consumption survey in Saint Kitts and Nevis

26 April, 2021, Bridgetown, Barbados – Saint Kitts and Nevis (SKN) is the first country in the Caribbean to have carried out an individual food consumption survey using a tailor made software (myfood24) which collects information on what people eat and drink over the previous 24-hour period (24-hour recalls). The FAO-funded survey was carried out between November 2020 and January 2021 and included a representative sample of adults between 18 and 65 years. The University of the West Indies, Federal University of Paraná, Ministry of Health on behalf of the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis (UWI), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) collaborated closely over the last 18 months in the preparation and implementation of the survey and in the statistical analysis of the data. The Caribbean version of myfood24 contains 30,000 foods and recipes from SKN, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the Caribbean, together with nutrient composition and quantification making it a useful survey tool for the entire region.

The survey revealed that two-thirds (64%) of the SKN adult population was reported to be overweight or obese. Preliminary analysis from the survey data has also indicated that dietary intake was generally low in terms of energy compared to dietary recommendations. This observation may be partially due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For many vitamins and minerals, low intakes were observed compared to recommendations for groups of the population: Intakes of vitamins A, B1, B2, B6, B9, C, E, Calcium, Zinc, Magnesium, and Iron were problematic. The intake of sodium was higher than recommendations for more than half of the sample population. Furthermore, a high fat and sugar intake was observed with 29% of energy coming from fat and 21% from sugar. The high consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is of public health concern: 40% of the population consumed fruit and vegetable drinks, 25% added sugar to their tea or coffee, 15% drank soft drinks, and 12% consumed alcoholic beverages.

“The newly collected data provide an evidence base for future policies and programs to strengthen healthy eating with less sugar, fat and salt”, said Ruth Charrondiere, the Nutrition Officer at the FAO office for Latin America and the Caribbean. There are many small but important changes that people can make to their diet to make it healthier, such as cutting down on sugar added to hot drinks, drink more water, reducing frying foods, or eat more fresh fruits. As 2021 is also the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, it could be a brilliant opportunity to replace some of the sugar-sweetened beverages with fresh fruits or vegetables. It is also important to remember that this is the first snapshot of dietary intakes in Saint Kitts and Nevis, which will allow us to monitor and assess the evolution of intakes over the next years.

Future food consumption surveys in the Caribbean and in Latin America may profit from the specially adapted version of myfood24 produced for the survey, the new photobook of household measurements, foods and recipes; the training material developed, and the experiences and lessons learnt from the survey planning and implementation. “I expect that this collaboration with UWI and our longstanding partnership with the CARICOM Secretariat on Food and Nutrition Security will enable other countries in the region to generate and analyze individual food consumption data to inform their approaches to promoting healthy diets”, said Renata Clarke, FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Caribbean.

“The complete set of food and nutrient intake data from the survey will be a great addition to the FAO/WHO GIFT platform (see <http://www.fao.org/gift-individual-food-consumption/en/>), where individual food consumption data are publicly available from all over the world. Such data are fundamental to inform future policies and programs in the area of nutrition and food safety”, added Bridget Holmes, Nutrition Officer from FAO Headquarters in Rome.

The visual images in the photobook can be used to encourage reflection about the quantity that one consumes. Additionally, it can be used to assist individuals to easily quantify foods and serving sizes accurately, added Isabella Granderson, Principal Investigator/Dietitian from the University of the West Indies.

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