

IMPROVING NUTRITION OF CHILDREN IN THE WEST AFRICAN SAHEL: PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF ANIMAL SOURCE FOODS

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Recent studies of nutrition among children under-five, and particularly children under two years of age, underscore the significant role that animal source foods play in long term development and growth of children. The Sahel is inhabited by populations across the livelihood spectrum – from urban populations, to agriculturalists, to agro-pastoralists, to pastoral nomads – whose food and nutritional security is highly variable and nuanced. Rates of malnutrition in the Sahel, as indicated by stunting and wasting, are among the highest in the world. Links between agriculture and nutrition, long neglected, are progressing, and researchers are investigating how to ensure the translation of increased production in the livestock sector to an increased consumption of nutrient rich foods. Livelihoods have historically served as strong predictors of dietary patterns, particularly regarding milk among livestock

holding communities and meat among urban populations. But with increased sedentarization of pastoralists, increased urbanization of rural populations, and increased globalization, food security, dietary diversity, and nutrition patterns are shifting.

As part of the USAID funded Livestock System Innovation Lab (LSIL), Dr. McKune is working with partners in Niger and Burkina Faso to better understand how and by what mechanisms increased production and consumption of animal source food can most effectively improve nutrition within the given context. The UF LSIL team hosted Innovation Platform meetings in Burkina Faso and Niger during June and October of 2016, and priorities identified during these stakeholder meetings will be funded through a competitive process during late 2016/early 2017. Dr. McKune is leading the human nutrition research for LSIL, examining three specific pathways to improved nutrition - income generation,



women's empowerment, and increased food production – and how they interact in various contexts.

While the LSIL is working in other African as well as south Asian countries, the focus in the Sahel is slightly different. Neither Burkina Faso nor Niger is designated as a Feed the Future country by USAID, rather the focus is on resilience. USAID's Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) program focuses on addressing the root causes of persistent vulnerability, and the UF LSIL's work in Burkina Faso and Niger hope to contribute to that effort and reduce malnutrition in children under two years of age.

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