

Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI) participates in 2nd IAOM Asia District Meeting in Bali, Indonesia.



Flour Fortification Initiative
A Public-Private-Civic Investment in Each Nation

IAOM Asia District Meeting

The International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM), one of the key partners of the Flour Fortification Initiative (FFI), was founded in 1896 to provide educational and training opportunities for the grain processing industries. The Association further aims to promote a spirit of fellowship and cooperation among the grain millers and industries and individuals allied or closely associated with the milling industry. Membership of the IAOM is organized in various international regions called districts. Currently 15 of such districts had been established around the world.

Approximately 180 professionals from the international milling industry attended the 2nd IAOM Southeast Asia District's meeting at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Bali, Indonesia from 30 October – 2 November 2011. The objectives of the meeting were to provide technical and educational opportunities to milling professionals in Asia-Pacific as well as to provide a forum for networking for people working in the milling industry.

The conference featured educational presentations that ranged from flour correction through additives to fast grain analysis at receiving points, and reports on equipment modifications and upgrades to food safety and pest control practices.

Also the activities of the **Flour Fortification Initiative** (FFI), a network of partners working together to make flour fortification a standard milling practice, was on the agenda. FFI builds alliances between governments and international agencies, wheat and flour industries, and consumer and civic organizations. FFI's strategy is to stimulate interaction among the partners so that together we can achieve results that none of us could achieve independently. The goal of FFI is for 80% of the world's industrial flour to be fortified with at least iron or folic acid by 2015.

Scott Montgomery, FFI Director, said the nutrients added to flour “make people smarter, stronger, and healthier.” He also noted the current Fortify for Life Campaign, which celebrates the 15-year history of birth defects being prevented due to flour fortification with folic acid.

Women need extra folic acid to help prevent a type of birth defect known as neural tube defects. The most common neural tube defect is spina bifida in which the baby's spine is not formed correctly. Spina bifida can be treated, but it cannot be cured, and these children have varying degrees of permanent disability. A less common type of neural tube defect is anencephaly. This is when the brain is not formed correctly. Children with anencephaly die shortly after birth.



In 1996 Oman was the first country to achieve national scale fortification of flour with folic acid to prevent neural tube birth defects. The United States and Canada also began to fortify with folic acid in 1996, but it took longer for these larger countries to reach national scale fortification. Now of the 63 countries requiring flour fortification, 57 include folic acid in the standard.

The result of fortifying flour with folic acid has been a tremendous decline in the rates of neural tube birth defects. Countries which monitor birth defects report a 30 to 70 percent decline in birth defects as a result of flour fortification. The decline varies based on the incidence rate before fortification, the amount of folic acid to flour, and the amount of flour consumed in a country.

Research published in 2008 estimated that 22,000 neural tube birth defects are prevented every year due to flour fortification. That's an average of 60 healthy babies a day. This is progress that all of FFI's partners can celebrate.



FFI booth at Expo

FFI was also present at the Expo where it celebrated 15 years of folic acid fortification with the Fortify For Life campaign and other important information on flour fortification. At right, Bruno Berken from BIPEA, right, visits with Scott Montgomery, center, and Jeff Gwartz at the FFI booth.



FFI Asia Strategy Development Meeting on 2 November 2011

On the 2nd of November FFI organized a half day meeting to present initial findings regarding the burden of disease and fortification opportunities in the Asian region. Forty-one participants from 12 countries (Malaysia, Singapore, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Australia, USA, Canada, and Japan) were in attendance, discussion revolved around how the private sector can work with FFI and its counterparts to overcome birth defects related to deficiency of folic acid. Participants also discussed other vitamin and mineral deficiencies and ideas for a feasible and effective strategy for wheat flour fortification in the Asian region.

In Asia, currently only Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal have mandatory regulations for fortifying flour.

Since early 2011 FFI has been developing a strategy to significantly accelerate progress in achieving flour fortification in Asia. Preliminary work was presented during the meeting and feedback from stake holders sought. FFI made an inventory of partner activities in Asia, it analysed the local/regional industry, consumption patterns and the potential health impact of

both wheat flour and rice fortification. Discussion points were implications for flour sales and trade, costs of fortification, interactions with governments on flour regulations and standards, equipment requirements and quality assurance.