“Salt Reduction in Bread and Bakery products”

Salt reduction has been identified as a high priority of public health importance worldwide. It is well known that increased salt intake contributes to raised blood pressure, while increasing evidence points to the fact that high blood pressure is the most important risk factor for global mortality. Therefore, actions towards salt reduction are of utmost importance. A recent report by the European Commission regarding the implementation of the EU salt reduction framework\(^1\), has identified bread, cereals and bakery products as the most important sources of salt in most national diets among the member states of the EU. Bread is generally not regarded as a food “high in salt”. However, considering that bread is a staple food in most diets (including the Mediterranean diet), bread can contribute significantly to total salt intake, if consumed frequently and in considerable amounts. The recent EU report mentions that among the 13 countries that have quantified the contribution of the different food sources to total salt intake, bread ranged between 19.1% in Spain to 28% in France. In Greece, we have not been able to quantify the contribution of bread to total salt intake due to lack of national dietary surveys. Nevertheless, a recent study\(^2\) conducted in children all over Greece, has pointed to the importance of bread consumption to total salt intake and the importance of bread as a “hidden” source of salt.

Among the issues that had been raised between scientists and policy makers in Greece, was the lack of official composition data regarding the salt content of bread. The Hellenic Food Authority in collaboration with the General Chemical State Laboratory carried out a programme investigating the range of salt content in various types of bread from two regions in Greece using a validated method of sodium analysis in bread. The results showed that salt content varies considerably in bread and indicates the need to raise awareness among all artisan bakers to produce bread low in salt.

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In QBAKE project, it was found that even though Research and Development centers (RTDs) were aware of the need for bakers' training with regard to producing bread and bread products low in salt, this was not viewed as a high priority among bakers. Despite the fact that some bakers, responding to the needs of their customers, have made serious efforts in producing bread low in salt, this practice needs to be extended to all bakers. A horizontal salt reduction in all types of bread in all bakeries was also stressed in a recent technical meeting of World Health Organization (European Region) on salt reduction, which took place in Ankara on 29-30th of May 2013. In that meeting, part of the QBAKE project was presented as well as some preliminary data regarding salt content of bread sold in small bakeries in Greece. In addition, the importance of national and international collaborations was also stressed. QBAKE is regarded as an excellent example of such international collaboration. However, on the issue of reducing salt in bread and bakery products, it is clear that more efforts should be made - possibly through similar collaboration(s) - involving policy makers, consumers and, of course, bakers.

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