



Lessons from the Field Salt Reduction in ARGENTINA



MANDATE

Argentina committed to the global effort of combatting non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by approving a national NCD strategy and health plan in 2009. The objectives included research on salt reduction feasibility and engagement with industry to reformulate.



LESS SALT, MORE LIFE

The two-year Less Salt, More Life initiative built awareness about salt reduction, creating demand for change among consumers and lowering resistance from food producers. Public-private partnerships effectively targeted bakeries to reduce salt in breads and encouraged voluntary reformulation in four other food groups. Media campaigns targeted consumers to decrease use of table salt and informed about the health risks of a high salt diet.



DATA DRIVEN

Modelling studies estimated reduced salt consumption following the Less Salt, More Life campaign would result in 19,000 fewer deaths from all related causes. Further projections demonstrated that maintaining the campaign for 10 years would decrease average daily salt consumption by 4.5g.



POLITICAL MOMENTUM

A favorable political environment paved the way for legislative action. A resistance to sugar reduction measures may have encouraged progress on salt. A National Sodium Reduction Commission was convened by the Ministry of Health, which played a pivotal role in targeting key stakeholders and moved the salt reduction strategy forward.



SODIUM REDUCTION LAW

The National Sodium Reduction Commission developed voluntary targets for salt levels in foods in 2011, preparing the industry for reformulation. A key consideration was addressing the technical barriers and special needs of small food producers, considering different timeframes, capacity building and support. When voluntary targets produced limited results, Argentina enacted the Sodium Reduction Law in 2014 that created mandatory salt targets, and additionally required health warning labels on foods with high salt content and restricted salt shakers in restaurants. To continue the gradual strengthening of targets, a Joint Resolution was introduced in 2017 extending salt limits to additional food categories.



STRENGTHENING COMPLIANCE

Monitoring compliance with salt targets was challenging due to lack of participation by provincial authorities. The government began offering economic incentives for implementing monitoring schemes to provinces through a World Bank loan for NCDs.

SHAKE the Salt Habit

Key Events

2009

- National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases and the National Health Plan of Argentina approved.
- Less Salt, More Life program launched, aiming to reduce salt intake to 5g/day through public-private partnerships, voluntary salt reduction targets, and awareness campaigns.

2010

- National Sodium Reduction Commission formed by the Ministry of Health, which brought together stakeholders from different sectors.

2011

- Voluntary and Progressive Reduction of the Sodium content of Processed Foods signed by Government.
 - 5%-15% target sodium reduction in processed meat, cheese and dairy products, soups and dressings, and cereal based foods.
- Baseline mean salt intake based on spot urines estimated at 11.0 g/day.

2013

- Sodium Reduction Law (National Act 26.905) passed, which included:
 - Mandatory maximum sodium levels set in 18 food categories.
 - A restaurant strategy to restrict salt shakers and offer low-sodium menus and educational campaigns aimed at the general population.
 - Labelling foods with warnings of over-consumption of salt.
 - Limiting size of salt packets

2014

- Sodium Reduction Law enters force December 2014.

2017

- Joint Resolution 1-E/2017 introduced new maximum sodium limits in the Argentinean Food Code, adding meats, frozen bread dough, cereal based snacks, and other categories.

Argentina adapted interventions from the **SHAKE** Technical Package, a how-to guide for salt reduction based on very cost-effective interventions ("best buys"). See next page for more information.

Lessons learned from implementing SHAKE interventions in Argentina

Salt Reduction Activities

Lessons Learned

Stakeholder Insights

SURVEILLANCE

- ✓ Baseline population salt intake estimated at 11g/day¹
- ✓ Baseline salt levels in processed foods measured

- Cheesemakers, bakeries, and other small-scale food producers may require additional knowledge and resources to measure salt composition of products.
- Offer access to state run laboratories for food analysis, if available.

"We don't know which percentage of enterprises and products available implemented this reduction so we don't know how close to this simulation we are."

Government

HARNESS THE FOOD INDUSTRY TO REFORMULATE

- ✓ Salt targets set and Sodium Reduction Law in place

- Small scale producers may be poorly equipped to reformulate products. Offer technical support and education to lower the barrier to reformulation.
- Categories such as soups are produced by a few leading companies. This makes it easier to negotiate targets.
- Easy, cheap and practical tools, such as salt measuring cups, can help standardize salt added during bread making.
- Start with voluntary targets to prepare industry for regulation.

"Bakers didn't know that adding more salt means you need more yeast. Cutting the salt actually makes it cheaper."

Government research institute

ADOPT STANDARDS FOR LABELLING AND MARKETING

- ✓ Labelling foods and restaurant menus with warnings of high salt diets

- Need for communications campaign to inform public of labelling.
- Need monitoring scheme for labelling laws to be implemented.

"Having a high salt warning label can help to set more challenging targets."

Government

KNOWLEDGE - EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- ✓ Less Salt, More Life campaign informed the public about why reformulation was taking place

- Need for a well-crafted, behaviour specific, national campaign that continues well beyond the initial phase.
- Media spotlight can boost industry involvement, e.g. bakers had direct access to governors and put salt reduction on their agenda.

"The public opinion became more familiar with the topic, based on the communication of the social media and press releases, and the environment became more favourable for the creation of a law."

Government

ENVIRONMENT - SUPPORTIVE SETTINGS FOR HEALTHY EATING

- ✓ Removing salt-shakers from restaurants and standardizing size of salt packets to below 0.5g

- Need for provincial implementation.
- Potential in schools using children as agents of change.

"The salt packet gives you an idea of an individual serving and helps establish a more rational measure."

Government

¹ Estimate based on spot urines in pilot study.

