

Resisting Economy, Dairy Products Consumption and Public Health Policy: Current Status & Future Planning

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Per capita consumption of milk and dairy products in Iran is about 60 kg which, unfortunately, is extremely low compared to regional countries like Pakistan (159 kg), Turkey (138 kg), Armenia (136 kg), Azerbaijan Republic (119 kg), several of them having quite lower GDP than ours. It is supposed that 90% of the people of the country have calcium deficiency, with mean age of low bone density at 30 years old. The problem would become more serious when we consider that this low consumption rate of dairy products is not only due to the public nutritional habits, but according to the health authorities, dairy consumption has experiences a rapid fall down after austerity measures have been put to the country's economy resulting in a rapid increase in the price.

Milk and dairy products are of outmost importance in the diet of human populations, especially due to their exceptional role in providing calcium resources to the body, and calcium is the main mineral that constructs bones and teeth; therefore, its deficiency can seriously affect public health, especially the youth, and as a result, future of the society. Any decrease in the bone mineral density, even minimal, in the large scale of a society can lead to a public health catastrophe, especially in the older ages. So, providing milk and dairy products that gives enough calcium content to all the age groups, especially to the youth should be a priority of health policy to any nation.

The past week, some news has been published indicating new raises in the prices of milk products that brought serious concerns among the health professionals of the country. In fact, producing factories have announced that since then, the price of dairy products would be determined by the law of "demand and supply"! Considering the current status of milk and dairy production in the country, this is a real disaster! Producers of dairy products are supported by especial governmental and financial support, and they should be even more supported nonetheless they should be allowed to follow any policy they like to increase their income, which for this purpose, they should get under strict control by the governmental control. In a country like Iran, which is

under heavy economic sanctions, providing enough milk products to the society of any economic level should be secured by the country's authorities, as a governmental obligation. This necessitates maximum production of these products, with affordable prices to the nation, that is in stark contrast to the law of "demand and supply", which aims to maximize financial benefit to the producers only, and inevitably is associated with a decrease in the production rate to the level that 'very poor' and 'poor' people would be unable to purchase. According to the authorities, at the current time, the rate of dairy products consumption in Iran is almost one forth of recommendations, and any more reduction in it could make the situation more critical.

We propose that at the first step, the gap between milk production rates in the country and an optimal production level to be determined; then, financial support in order to save the facilities in hard times should be considered, and the risk of bankruptcy should be eliminated by some governmental warrant for all the current and prospective producers. On the other hand, the price of milk productions should be strictly controlled by the government, warranting acceptable prices either for the producers as well as the poor consumers. This policy urges the producers to produce more, if they want to make more fortune. We wish this policy to be installed as soon as possible, so we can save a good health to our society, through these hard times.

