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FORMULA AND THE AUSTRALIAN MAIF AGREEMENT.

Breastfeeding is the ideal means for nourishing infants from birth. Unfortunately, not every mother can or does breastfeed and in this case, formula is the only acceptable option for the first 12 months. All formula in Australia is required to meet stringent government standards of hygiene and nutritional quality. The marketing of formula is governed by the MAIF Agreement.

The WHO Code was endorsed by the World Health Assembly of the United Nations in 1981 with the aim :-

"To contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants, by the protection and promotion of breast feeding and by ensuring the proper use of breast milk substitutes, when these are necessary on the basis of adequate information and through appropriate marketing and distribution."

- The Code prohibits the advertising of breast milk substitutes, bottles and teats directly to the public, regulates their promotion to health professionals and contains provisions regarding composition, quality control and labelling of infant formula.
- It was intended as a model set of recommendations for member countries to adapt to their own local, legal, social, political and economic situations.

The WHO Code recognises that mothers who bottle feed their babies should be given appropriate information and support from health professional. Mothers need to be informed about safe preparation and storage of formula. The Australian/MAIF Agreement also recognises the right of mothers who make an informed choice to bottle feed to be given all the necessary support and advice.

Implementation of the WHO Code in Australia.

This has been achieved by:-

1. Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas - Manufacturers and Importers Agreement (MAIF Agreement).

The MAIF Agreement based on the WHO Code, is a voluntary Agreement controlling the marketing of infant formula in Australia. Its signatories include manufacturers and importers of infant formula and it has been authorized under the Trade Practices Act by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (A.C.C.C.). The Australian Government has encouraged and supported industry self-regulation in accordance with the Code. An independent panel, APMAIF (Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant formula) has been set up to oversee the implementation of the MAIF Agreement.

The Australian/MAIF Agreement defines an infant formula as any food sold as a breast milk substitute for the feeding of infants up to 12 months of age. It covers the marketing of both infant formula from birth and "follow on" formulas. This is in contrast to the WHO Code where infant formula is defined as a breast milk substitute satisfying the requirements of infants between 4 to 6 months of age. The WHO Code therefore applies only to infant formula suitable from birth and not "follow on" formulas.

The Australian/MAIF Agreement allows manufacturers and importers to supplement government education materials. Educational materials and equipment from manufacturers and importers may bear the company's logo and name of sponsoring company but may not refer to a product.

Infant Formula samples may be provided to health professionals for their professional evaluation of



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the product. "Professional evaluation" includes information on ingredients, nutritional profile, taste and preparation. Samples can also be provided for the assessment of the suitability of a formula for an individual infant where the mother has made an informed decision to use infant formula. (The MAIF Agreement requires health professionals to provide these mothers with preparation and mixing instructions on the correct and safe use of infant formula). The infant's progress must be checked at a follow up meeting by the health professional. All product samples must be kept out of public view (*Infant Formula Manufacturers Association of Australia (IFMAA) Sample Guidelines developed further with discussions at the 46th meeting of the APMAIF Panel on the 5/12/03*)

2. Australian Retailers and Manufacturers and Marketers of Infant Bottles and Teats.

The Australian Agreement **does not** cover the promotion of infant formula by pharmacies or supermarkets. It also does not apply to the manufacturers of products such as bottles and teats, nor to their marketing practices.

3. Legislation.

Aspects of hygiene and nutrient requirements of infant formulas addressed in the WHO Code, are covered in Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), Food Standards Code, Standard 2.9.1, Infant Formula Products. Labelling requirements complying with the Code are also included in this standard, such as a statement about the superiority of breast milk and a warning regarding incorrect preparation of formula. Other Standards relating to milk products must carry warnings that they are unsuitable for infants except on medical advice.

4. Adoption of Health Care Policies by Health Authorities.

All health care professionals, hospitals and baby clinics recognise that breast is best and promote breast feeding accordingly. The National Health and Medical Research Council's Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents and Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers reflect the recommendations of the WHO Code.

References.

1. International Code of Marketing Breast –milk substitutes. World Health Organisation, Geneva. 1981.
2. Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas: Manufacturers and Importers Agreement. May 1992.
3. Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula. Annual Reports.
www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/foodpolicy/apmaif.htm
3. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code, Standard 2.9.1. Infant Formula Products
4. Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents and Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers. NH&MRC. 2003.