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Food industry sponsorship and the nutrition profession: Why we can’t have our cake and eat it

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Public health nutrition as a field of professional practice is building momentum at a global level. This is evidenced by the decision at 1st World Congress of Public Health Nutrition in Barcelona in September 2006, to form the World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA). Debate within the international public health nutrition community about the importance of maintaining independence from the food and beverage industry (FBI) has been at the forefront of discussions leading up to the drafting of the associations constitution, and serves as a potent reminder of the professional risks associated with these partnerships. The key themes derived from this dialogue outline principles that have relevance to an analysis of the risks of DAA’s ongoing partnership/sponsorship arrangements with FBI interests including:

- professional credibility being a professional organisations main currency of value to stakeholders (particularly consumers and government)
- independence from vested interest being a critical determinant of credibility
- transparency and mechanisms that promote disclosure of interests being critical for professional independence and credibility.

Consistent with these principles the WPHNA’s draft constitution rejects receiving funding from this sector and limits membership on decision making committees to members unencumbered by a history of financial or other interests with the FBI. This supports a point of view that the ongoing willingness of the DAA to engage with industry partners and accept sponsorship is at odds with the principles outlined by the global public health nutrition community.