

“Mind your Food”

New perspectives on the role of the mind in sustainable food: bridging the sciences of mind, health and nutrition.

I. Introduction and Context

Positive Health & Well being

In recent decades, science has broadened the perspective on how to ensure the health and well-being of people. The constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) defines ‘health’ as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is increasingly defined as mental health, well-being and happiness, also known as *positive health*. People can learn to develop life-styles and behaviors to enhance mental health and well-being,

The newly emerging field of *contemplative science* supports this trend by shedding a new light on the potential for positive health. This field researches the effects of mind-training on mental and physical health and well-being, investigating how relatively simple practices such as meditation, movement, mindful sleeping and eating may help people improve their habits and lifestyles, which can significantly enhance mental health and well-being and prevent many mind-related and other diseases.

The Food Crisis

At the heart of a growing global health crisis is *food*: If we include those getting too little, too much or the wrong types of food, around half the world’s population is malnourished – and unhealthy diets are now linked to one in five deaths globally. Food is also driving some of our greatest environmental challenges: the agricultural sector is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the main driver of deforestation, biodiversity loss and destruction of ecosystems.

Just as we are starting to understand the complexity of food and its production, we are also beginning to uncover positive synergies. For example, a growing number of scientists agree that plant-based food from sustainable production systems is better for both people and the planet. There is robust scientific evidence showing that such diets can not only mitigate health & environmental problems – but even prevent them. The UN Business Commission for SDG’s has calculated that a food system that is healthy, fair, sustainable and inclusive could create hundreds of millions of jobs – and generate more than 2 trillion dollars of new economic value by 2030.

We now need more integrated knowledge on the key links and interrelationships between food, planet, health and the human mind, and clear science-based targets.

II. Mind your Food (MyF) Initiative

Research outcomes from the Mind your Food initiative will contribute to developing science-based policies and practices that foster sustainable health and well-being for individuals and the environment. Understanding the role of the mind and consciousness in nutrition and the interactions between mind function and diet is essential to shaping healthy diets and sustainable food systems. This is a relatively underexplored area of research, with potentially far-reaching positive effects on human lives, health care, the economy and our natural environment.

MyF will convene scientists, innovators and leaders in the food, health and nutrition sectors. Through a series of invitational events, MyF will explore both the cognitive and embodied dimensions of health, nutrition and food, with the goal of achieving breakthroughs in thinking about how to realize healthy and sustainable food systems.

Mind your Food events

To link these trends with the mind-sciences, we propose that the first meeting focus on specifying and elaborating the connections between positive health, sustainable food and nutrition, and the mind sciences.

While the end goal is to develop practical solutions, the first retreat will be characterized as “basic” research. Since the encounter between the mind sciences and food/environmental research is new territory, it is ground from which fresh and relevant hypotheses and questions for research can arise. Thus this first interdisciplinary retreat will determine the research questions at the nexus of these disciplines that hold the most promise.

MyF includes a series of learning events, from more fundamental to more applied research questions, culminating in practical recommendations.

Initial Questions/Survey

In view of the novelty of this exploration, we have defined 8 core questions to determine the scope of this study. We plan to develop a survey on the basis of these questions to be sent to some 50 leading experts and practitioners in the food, health and well-being sectors, and experts in the mind and behavioral sciences and contemplative studies and practice.

The role of the Mind in Food and Nutrition- General

1. To what extent has **our mind a role to play** in shaping sustainable food systems, healthy diets, and our health and wellbeing? What are examples, and where are key gaps.
2. **How has this role been addressed** by different scientific disciplines (e.g. neuroscience, psychology, nutrition, health, behavior, economics, contemplative science etc.), by practitioners (in different sectors), and by policy makers?

3. What could be the **potentially unique role for contemplative science** - as a bridge between the empirical study of the brain and the experiential study of the mind through contemplation and other 'first-person' practices - in the research and practices dedicated to shaping sustainable food systems, health diets, and our health and wellbeing in general?

Effects of Food on the Mind

4. What are **the effects of food on the mind?** Is eating certain foods an **influencing factor in what and the way we think and feel- for example in relation to addiction, ADHD, anxiety disorders, depression etc.?**
5. What are **the effects of agricultural practices on the mind (i.e. on our beliefs?)** - e.g. many farmers, for example, believe that pesticides are an indispensable ingredient to farming; effects of these pressures influence how we think about food and how we make our food choices.

Effects of the Mind on Food

6. What are important insights from contemplative science, especially **the primacy of the mind in how we behave?**
 - a) How is food behavior determined by the mind?
 - b) How can mind-training impact our food choices? Can meditation help to enhance sustainable food choices?
 - c) Can mind-training programs be developed that help people make better food choices for themselves?
7. Are there any effects from contemplative practice on biological levels, such as metabolism and at epigenetic levels such as DNA?

Perspectives from Contemplative traditions

8. How can **food-related practices from age-old contemplative traditions**, such as ritual fasting, and certain diets, which appear to benefit on our health and well-being, be understood from a scientific viewpoint?
 - a) What is the relevance of this for our food behavior?
 - b) And how can these be practiced in society at large?
9. How can we understand notions such as **vital force/subtle body of foods and its nutritional value?** For instance, do foods grown bio dynamically have a greater nutritional value and resilience than traditionally grown foods? Can the 'life force' be measured and what effect, if any, does it have on our nutrition? (This life force is historically known by different names in different traditions, including *Feinstoffkörper*, etheric body, life body. In the Indian Ayurveda philosophy is called *prana* and in Chinese medicinal tradition it is known as *chi*.)

Academic/Practitioner Resource

We are identifying academic experts and practitioners in the relevant domains who can contribute to focusing the key issues and questions and contributing research and perspectives to the dialogue. We are also identifying leaders from business, health care and health policy institutions.

Tasks and Budget

Barbara Bulc, a senior policy advisor in the field of global health (see bio below) will support this initiative, including:

1. Develop a comprehensive mapping of key global actors in the fields of health, nutrition and mind for MLE and “Mind your Food” initiative’s engagement
2. Systematically position MLE “Mind your Food” unique value-add and opportunities and identify priority partners to realize this initiative, and its first retreat in 2018
3. Develop a report for MLE and its Board summarizing findings and opportunities going forward

Mapping study/Report:	€ 15,000
Founding meeting:	€ 25,000
Total 2018:	€ 40,000

The study will include the identification of possible funding sources for MyF.

Possible funding sources:

- Innovative funders, such as Wellcome Trust
- Governments agencies (Health and SDG oriented)
- Private Foundations/private individuals
- Corporate Foundations

Participants Retreat

A selection of experts at intersection food/mind & consciousness, combined with leaders from governments, private sector, health insurance, international agencies such as the WHO, the EU, civil society and research institutions to meet in late 2018.

Biography Barbara Bulc

Barbara Bulc is Founder and President of *Global Development – Reaching Scale* (GD) in Geneva, Switzerland. She has over 20 years of leadership and advisory experience in international development, global health, diplomacy and the pharmaceutical industry, working with the private sector, governments, international organizations and NGOs in Europe, the U.S., Africa, and Asia.

Preceding her career in global health and international development, Mrs. Bulc was the CEO of KRKA Pharmaceuticals U.S., one of the leading European generics companies. She worked in various positions with Novartis (Switzerland), Knoll, and BASF (Germany).

She holds a degree in chemistry from Ljubljana University in Slovenia and executive degrees in business management from Columbia University Business School in New York, and leadership from Cambridge University Judge Business School.