

Brazil has laws that protect against "Big Food" and "Big Snack"

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Under pressure from civil society organizations, the Brazilian government has introduced legislation to protect and improve its traditional food system, standing in contrast to the governments of many industrialized countries that have partly surrendered their prime duty to protect public health to transnational food companies, argue nutrition and public health experts writing in this week's *PLoS Medicine*.

Carlos Monteiro and Geoffrey Cannon, from the Center for [Epidemiological Studies](#) in Health and Nutrition of the University of São Paulo, explain that, in Brazil, traditional long-established food systems and dietary patterns are being displaced by ultra-processed products made by transnational food corporations ("Big Food" and "Big Snack") contributing to increases in the incidence of obesity and of major chronic diseases, and adversely affecting public health and public goods by undermining culture, meals, the family, community life, local economies, and national identity.

The authors argue: "The use of law to protect and improve food systems and supplies, and thus public health, may be difficult in parts of the world where governments have already ceded the responsibility of governance to transnational and other corporations. However, in Brazil protection of public health still remains a prime duty of government."

The authors explain that by law, all Brazilian children attending state schools are entitled to one daily meal at school, at least 70% of the food supplied to schools must be fresh or minimally processed, and a

minimum of 30% of this food must be sourced from local family farmers. They say that such measures help to check the penetration of transnational corporations into Brazil.

Although the penetration of such corporations into Brazil has been rapid, the tradition of shared and family meals remains strong and is likely to provide protection to national and regional food systems.

The authors say: "Notwithstanding intense pressures, which include ubiquitous television and internet propaganda designed to turn eating and drinking into constant individual snacking, food and drink consumption is not yet dislocated and isolated from family and social life in Brazil."

The authors argue that Brazil's experiences in resisting "Big Food" and "Big Snack" can help other countries. They say: "the Brazilian experience provides a basis for the design of rational, comprehensive, and effective public health policies and actions designed to protect and promote nutrition in all its senses."

More information: Monteiro CA, Cannon G (2012) The Impact of Transnational "Big Food" Companies on the South: A View from Brazil. PLoS Med 9(7): e1001252.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001252

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