Dairy industry attempts to weaken Brazil’s baby milk law

Background: The Brazilian law implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent, relevant Resolutions of the World Health Assembly is successfully stopping aggressive baby food marketing practices. Breastfeeding rates have been increasing in Brazil as a result of this and other efforts to promote breastfeeding. It is now under attack by the dairy industry, which puts its own profits before the health of infants and the rights of mothers.

In 2003 Baby Milk Action’s supporters joined with others as the dairy industry attempted to weaken the law in the Brazilian Congress. We succeeded on that occasion. Now the industry is trying again. Congress members sympathetic to the industry brought amendments to a law promoting economic growth, arguing that a warning on labels was hampering the dairy industry. Despite opposition mobilized by our partners in Brazil, the law will be weakened if the Senate does not block the changes.

The law presently requires labels of whole milks to contain a ‘Ministry of Health warning’ about the risks of using the product for infant feeding. This has been described by a member of the ‘rural platform’ of Congress members as an ‘injustice’. They have voted to downgrade the warning to an ‘important notice’. Whole milk is a third of the price of infant formula and companies such as Nestlé market whole milk in the infant feeding sections of pharmacies and supermarkets. One study found that 70% of poor mothers who were using powdered milk for infant feeding used whole milk rather than formula.

You can help by sending a message to Senators along the following lines. You can send these by email to the addresses given with the on-line version of this sheet in the ‘codewatch’ section of the Baby Milk Action website www.babymilkaction.org

Brazil’s law on the marketing of baby milk, No. 11.265/2006, is seen as an example to other countries as it is ensuring mothers receive correct information about infant feeding. As a result breastfeeding rates are recovering in Brazil and the risk of inappropriate feeding are reduced.

It is a concern to hear that Brazil may weaken the ‘Ministry of Health warning’ on whole milks. It is essential this warning remains as incorrect use of whole milk is too common. I hope you will take appropriate action.

This picture is taken from one of Nestlé’s own audit reports and shows the Nido whole milk next to Nan formula.