

Call for Proposals

The Edema-Steernberg program: Why Do We Eat, What We Eat?

Context and objective of Foundation

The Edema-Steernberg¹ Foundation aims to stimulate scientific research and exchange knowledge on social determinants of dietary habits. The central question is: **Why Do We Eat, What We Eat?**

The objective is to establish a coherent and interlinked research and training program. Projects integrate social determinants of nutrition behaviour with biological factors related to nutrition and health. To achieve this, collaboration among disciplines from the social and natural sciences is a prerequisite. Funding allows enrolling 2-3 PhD students, 2 sandwich PhD students, 4 MSc students and a part time postdoc. The program aims at research activities in The Netherlands and in developing countries. The PhD projects should result in a PhD thesis that is defended at Wageningen University. After completion of the program, it is expected that research and training in this important domain continue with internal and external funds.

Scientific background and problem formulation

Food choice and food intake are influenced by a large range of interrelated social factors at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. Food consumption is first of all not only determined by physiological and nutritional needs but also by a host of social characteristics. These factors may include socio-economic variables as well as cultural, religious and demographic factors. For example, an individual's socio-economic status, such as indicated by his or her educational, occupational, or income level has large effects on food choice, food literacy, sensory preferences, and food/nutrient intake patterns. Individuals that are higher educated and/or have a higher income generally choose healthier foods resulting in a better nutritional and health status, as indicated by biological risk factors for health and disease. The culture someone lives or is brought up in, and its accompanying taboos and norms determine food allocation according to gender and age. These factors have a strong influence on the development of food preferences, the type of food choices that are made and the actual food intake of different household members.

The immediate social context, constituting the meso-level, including family, friends and peers, as well as (social) media influences, determine food choices,

¹ Mrs. Drs. J.M. Edema, worked at the Department of Human Nutrition of the former Wageningen Agricultural University from 1968-1987. Her teaching and research activities focused on the social aspects of nutrition. Mrs. Edema passed away on 23 December 2015. Mid 2015 she took the initiative to establish The Edema-Steernberg Foundation, named after her parents.

for instance via processes of the mere exposure to foods, and mechanisms of social learning and social pressure. Macro-level factors such as availability, price, and the disposal and normative messages implicitly conveyed in connection with available food in supermarkets, restaurants, food outlets, schools, work, sports and clinical eating facilities also have an impact on food choice.

Recently, the life course perspective with its focus on individual development in changing contexts has enriched our understanding of the multiple ways in which foods, the individuals choosing them, and food choice environments are changing over time. It helps us to understand how people construct their food and eating choices over their life course and how changes in the food and eating environment affect those choices. Life course research on food choice shows for example important cohort differences in eating and food choice behaviour capturing socialization effects as well as period effects related to the availability of certain food items. It not only helps understanding how food choices and preferences develop in changing temporal, social and historical contexts but also how the (food) life histories of groups or individuals may explain differences in their health and nutritional status, i.e. the social and biological pathways of health chances and resilience and disease risks over the life span.

Despite of the fact that over the last decades research charting the impact of different social and cultural determinants on food choice and nutrition behaviour has received increasing attention, few studies have

- 1) Explicated the mechanisms through which social, biological-nutritional factors, alone or in tandem, influence food choice, sensory preferences, dietary patterns and nutrition behaviour from a life course perspective;
- 2) Quantified the relative impact of these different factors and their interactions;
- 3) Generated qualitative knowledge on the construction of food choices and practices over the life course.

Combining the most recent social science theories with those from the natural sciences related to nutrition, will likely improve the efficacy and effectiveness of nutrition communication, education and policy aimed at improving healthy dietary patterns.

Focus and aim of the research and training program

The research program focuses on customized nutrition in a socio-cultural context. The aim of the program is to explain 'why we eat what we eat' with an emphasis on the mechanisms that drive food practices, sensory preferences, food choice and nutrition behaviour from a life course perspective and paying particular attention to the interaction of social and biological/nutrition determinants.

Research proposals could address for instance :

- the analysis of food choice, food preferences or food practices across the life course

- specific food consumption issues in vulnerable groups at risk of malnutrition (= overnutrition or undernutrition), such as for instance low socioeconomic status or ethnic groups in Western societies and/or in children, adolescents, women and elderly in developing countries.
- the association between dietary patterns and health and gender, social and economic status of individuals .

Research proposals and/or training proposals are initiated by a combination of a chair-group from the Division of Human Nutrition and a chair-group from the Social Sciences Group of Wageningen University².

Procedures

Proposal submission

PhD and sandwich PhD positions: Pre-proposals (2 pages, see the attached format, the form can be found at <http://www.vlaggraduateschool.nl/res-proposal.htm> (use 'only for the VLAG rounds') can be submitted up to 15th May 2016. The board of the Foundation will decide which pre-proposals can proceed to the full proposal phase. Deadline for full-proposals will be most likely 15th July 2016. Full proposals will be sent out for external peer review. Rebuttals should be received by 15th September 2016 and within 3 weeks the Board will decide which proposals will be granted. Each PhD project will receive an amount of € 75.000 to cover (part of) the operational costs.

MSc positions: Selection will be the responsibility of the Anne van den Ban foundation after consultation of the study programme directors. The aim is to select two candidates that will start their MSc programme in September 2016.

Communication

The activities of the foundation will commence in 2016. A website with the basic information is available and will be updated with project information when available (www.wageningenur.nl/edema-steernberg-foundation).

Further information about this call for proposals can be obtained from the chairman of the Board of the Foundation prof. dr.ir. F.J. Kok (frans.kok@wur.nl). The Board of the Foundation will organise each year a half-day activity during which the activities funded by the Foundation will report about the progress.

² To ensure that funds are used in line with the wishes of Drs. Edema and efficiently, this call is open for Principal Investigators who are employed as assistant professor or associate professor by one of the following six chair groups of Wageningen University: - Nutrition and health during the life course, - Nutrition and disease, - Sensory science and eating behaviour (AFSG), and - Sociology of consumption and households, - Health and society, - Strategic Communication (SSG).

8. SUMMARY - PROBLEM DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES (max 1 page, Font: Arial 10)

9. SIGNATURES

Place:

Date:

Chairman of the leading Research Group**Project leader**

Name:

Name:

Signature:

Signature:

Please return completed form to:

Vesna Pršić (vesna.prsic@wur.nl)

VLAG Graduate School
Mail: P.O. Box 17
6700 AA Wageningen
or
Internal WUR mail nr. 184

Appendix - INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE VLAG GRADUATE SCHOOL PhD/PostDoc FORM

General: The space available for the content is limited.
Please respect the guidelines and predefined layout (letter type, letter size, line spacing, margins).

Question 1: Please provide names of the project and of the professor(s) who will act as thesis supervisor. The project leader bears the main responsibility for the project and fulfils the daily supervision. Thesis supervisor is referred to as 'promotor' in Dutch.

Question 2: Formulate English title of the research project as concisely and specifically as possible.

Question 3: Please indicate relevant Graduate School Research Theme

- A - Sustainable Food & Biobased Production
- B - Product & Ingredient Structuring and Functionality
- C - Food Safety & Integrity
- D - Nutrition, Metabolism and Health
- E - Biomolecular Interactions

Question 4: If (a part of) the project is carried out outside the Netherlands, please mention the country(s) involved. The second part of the question refers to the development co-operation.

Question 5a: Does this project involve working with volunteers and/or patients? Does it require a Medical Ethical review?

Question 5b: In some cases experimental animals may be used. The 'Law on Experimental Animals' regulates use of animals in experiments. Animal Experiments Committee (DEC) is in charge of control of the execution of the Law within the University. In case vertebrates are used in the proposed project DEC will provide you with a questionnaire.

Question 5c: Other ethical dilemmas

Ethical dilemmas, considerations and decisions should play an important role in the programming of research proposals. Ethical dilemmas deal with potential harm to society, people, animals and ecosystems and with the potential use or misuse of research results.

Relevant aspects are:

- o What are the funding organisations of the PhD research and what is their interest in the research results.
- o Research methods: animal experiments; involving people in your experiments.
- o Research location: research carried out in countries where human rights are violated.

Relevant questions may be:

- o For whom is the research question relevant;
- o Who can profit most of the research outcomes;
- o Who could be harmed most by the research outcomes;
- o Which development is supported by this research;
- o Does the research support sustainable development; etc.

In general there are no good or wrong answers to ethical dilemmas, but it is very important to present your own considerations clearly and transparently.

See also: The Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice at <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/About-Wageningen-UR/Integrity.htm>

Question 6: Please list the persons that are primarily involved in the execution of the research project including the research group / department / institute / other organisation at which they are employed. Please add an estimation of the input in hours per week per person. If it is a joint project of two (or more) research groups, note that clear appointments have to be made about capacity division.

Question 7: Please list the organisations collaborating in the context of this project. Mention only the collaboration partners whose involvement will result in concrete joint activities such as publications.

Question 8: This summary should explain the title of the research project in more detail. Adding a short summary of the problem definition and the objectives is deemed helpful.

Question 9: The chair holder of the research group and the project leader should sign the printed version of this form. For the electronic version of the (pre)proposal signature scan can be inserted.