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Development of an online Irish food-composition database

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Food-composition databases provide detailed information on the nutritional composition of foods, and quality food-composition databases are the cornerstone of nutrition research and public health nutrition, providing data for diet-related epidemiological studies, policy-making, consumer education and the food industry on nutrition labelling and product innovation. In response to the need for a common platform for food-composition databases throughout Europe, the European Food Information Resource Network (EuroFIR) has been established to link national food composition databases. Currently, Ireland does not have a national food-composition database and nutrition researchers borrow composition data from various sources, primarily the UK *McCance & Widdowson's Composition of Foods, Sixth Edition*⁽¹⁾.

The aim of the current project is to compile an Irish food composition database that is deployed online and compatible with international standards. In conjunction with EuroFIR, the Irish food-composition database is being compiled using standardised methodology, including description of nutrients, documentation of values, quality assessment of data points and food description using the *LanguaL* system⁽²⁾.

Composition data on foods specific to the Irish population, including Irish brands, commonly-consumed nutritional supplements and composite dishes, were collected between 1997 and 2007 during the national food consumption surveys (North/South Ireland Food Consumption Survey, National Children's Food Survey and National Teens' Food Survey). Currently, composition data on approximately 1000 foods have been compiled. Data for packaged products were sourced from manufacturers and composition data for composite foods were calculated from recipe ingredients. The Table quantifies the numbers of foods as composite dishes and manufactured products within different food groups in the current database, which will continue to expand as further data are collected. Manufactured cereal products, homemade composite meat and vegetable dishes and nutritional supplements are currently the key foods in this database.

Food group	Manufactured products	Composite dishes	Total
Meat and meat dishes	29	215	244
Cereals and cereal products	176	52	228
Nutritional supplements	102	–	102
Soups, sauces and pickles	52	41	93
Vegetable dishes	13	71	84
Beverages	64	1	65
Milk and milk products	52	8	60
Fish and fish products	16	34	50
Confectionery	37	2	39
Fruit (including juices)	8	19	27
Fats and oils	19	2	21
Egg dishes	0	20	20

By December 2008 the Irish database will be deployed online via the EuroFIR platform, where a common search engine will allow users to compare data from twenty-seven European food-composition databases, improving communication and data-sharing between countries.

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1. Food Standards Agency (2002) *McCance & Widdowson's The Composition of Foods, Sixth Edition*. Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry.
2. Müller A & Ireland J (editors) (2000) *LanguaL 2000. Introduction to the LanguaL Thesaurus. Food Sciences and Technology. COST Action 99*. Luxembourg: European Communities.