

Introduction

In May 2001, the Symposium Danone on Fermented Food, Fermentation and Intestinal Flora was organized by Danone Vitapole, in collaboration with the Instituto Danone Mexico and the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Médicas y de Nutrición Salvador Zubirán from Mexico D.F., Mexico.

Under the heading of Fermented Foods and Health Digestive Functions, a general vision of the effects of probiotics on the organism was given in this Symposium, including an introduction (Fermented milks: a historical food with modern applications) and 14 talks within five sessions entitled: 'Nutritional benefits of fermented foods', 'Nutrition and immune modulation', 'Gut ecology and well-being', 'Recent data on lactose digestion: the role of endogenous and exogenous flora' and 'Gastro-intestinal disorders and fermented foods'.

Probiotics have been defined as live micro-organisms which, when ingested in sufficient amounts, have a positive impact on host health, which goes beyond conventional nutritional effects. This is the reason why they are considered to be functional foods and their study, although complex, has a pretty promising future.

This supplement has been carried out in order to collect the most important results and conclusions given at the Symposium.

All the people who participated in the Symposium are indebted to Ms Irene Lenoir-Wijnkoop for her kindness, her support and for her very good work before, during and after the Symposium. We also acknowledge her group, especially to Miss Hilke Seyffarth for her valuable help throughout this event. The local organization was very well managed by Danone Mexico. The Symposium was held at the Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Médicas y de Nutrición Salvador Zubirán from Mexico D.F., Mexico. Both the Director of the Institute (Professor Hector Bourges, President of the Danone Institute in Mexico) and his group (Dr Jorge Luis Rosado, Dr Esther Casanueva, and Dr María Teresa Espinosa) welcomed all of us with open arms. We would also like to acknowledge the involvement and collaboration of Dr José Antonio Mateos and Dr José María Cobo from Danone Spain in this Symposium for taking care of the Spanish delegates.

The speakers who were selected to participate in this Conference are aware of the importance of continuing to find out the role played by probiotics on health. Events like this one are required by scientists in order to learn, to discuss and thus, to update and enhance the knowledge of this fascinating but still not completely explored field. Therefore, we encourage Food Industry to manage these meetings.

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