



NSSA SYMPOSIUM AT THE SAAFOST CONGRESS

The Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA) hosted a scientific symposium at the South African Association for Food Science and Technology (SAAFoST) conference on 26 August 2025 at the CSIR Convention Centre in Pretoria. The purpose of the symposium was to emphasise the need to enhance collaboration between food science professionals, food industry and nutrition experts to address public health nutrition.

Prof Mieke Faber gave a presentation with the title “Food Choice, the Young Child, and the Urban Nutrition Challenge” and highlighted the need to make affordable nutrient-dense foods available to all consumers, especially those who live in the lowest wealth indexes. Prof Faber indicated that the number of packaged foods aimed at infants and young children is growing rapidly, and that some of these foods contain inappropriate amounts of sugar and salt.

Dr Bianca van der Westhuizen presented on how the food environments have transformed in the past 10 years and highlighted the complexity of the current food environment with the expansion of the digital food environment, as well as the increased access to weight loss medications such as GLP-1 injections. Dr van der Westhuizen stated that access to fast food has increased to such an extent that a single fast-food outlet reportedly could have as many as 10 million customers per month.

This was followed by a panel discussion facilitated by Prof Elizabeth Kempen. The panel included Prof Mieke Faber, Dr Bianca van der Westhuizen, Prof Eugénie Kayitesi and Ingrid Woodrow. The discussion confirmed the need for a collaborative approach to address nutrition aspects in the country and comments from the audience indicated that new models for such an approach should be investigated. The role players mentioned during the discussion and recommended to be approached for collaboration should include nutrition experts, food scientists, government departments and retailers. These role players should build a relationship and develop trustworthiness between each other for this to succeed. The need to educate the consumer on nutrition matters was illustrated in several statements and that a potential starting point would be to improve nutrition education in schools. The matter of managing conflict of interest when nutrition experts are involved with industry-related research was discussed. Transparency and defined roles in research projects are important to protect the trust in science by ensuring the nutrition researcher produces unbiased research.

The symposium was well attended and served as a platform to initiate further discourse between food scientists, industry and nutrition experts.

*By Dr Elize Symington
NSSA Council Member*



From left to right: Dr Adeline Pretorius (session chair); Prof Elizabeth Kempen (Facilitator); Prof Eugénie Kayitesi (panel member); Ingrid Woodrow (panel member); Dr Bianca van der Westhuizen (speaker); Prof Mieke Faber (Speaker); Dr Elize Symington (closing remarks)