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Green Feeding – climate action from birth

KEY MESSAGES

1: Green Feeding safeguards the health of mothers, children and Mother Earth, now and for future generations.

Green Feeding refers to optimal and sustainable infant and young child feeding practices that protect the health of infants, young children and their mothers, as well as the biodiversity and environment of our planet – Mother Earth, now and for future generations.

2: Breastfeeding is often ignored by global climate action leaders, despite the fact that breastfeeding is the most environmentally friendly way to feed an infant.

Breastfeeding produces zero garbage, minimal greenhouse gases (GHG), and negligible water footprint. As a renewable natural food resource, mother's milk contributes to local food and water security.

3: Breastfeeding mothers continue to face structural barriers to optimal feeding practices.

These include the promotional practices of baby food companies, unsupportive hospital practices, inadequate maternity leaves, unfavourable conditions at work, and lack of access to affordable and skilled assistance.

4: Green Feeding contributes to the work of social justice and poverty reduction, offering protection to the most vulnerable infants and their families.

Breastfeeding creates a level playing field for family budgets and challenges inequalities in marginalized households and communities that are most negatively impacted by climate change. The high cost of infant formula and ultra-processed baby foods can overwhelm low and middle income households.

5: Breastmilk Substitutes (BMS) are ultra-processed expensive industrial foods that “cost the earth”.

Infant and toddler milks all have a negative impact on the environment during the manufacturing, processing, and transportation of ingredients such as powdered cow milk, soy or rice, vegetable oils, sugars and additives. As a result, the production of these artificial

foods contributes to greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming and climate changes.

6: Industrial dairy farms threaten biodiversity, and the run-off of waste from dairy farming threatens our water supply with contamination by effluent and harmful chemicals, including pesticides.

The manufacture of ultra-processed baby foods uses resources such as tin for cans and plastic for containers, bottles and teats, producing waste that ends up in landfills, further polluting our environment. Plastic pollution in particular is an environmental catastrophe made worse by the consumption of single-use articles.

7: Water and mother's milk are priceless resources that should not be commoditized for corporate profit. "Water for life and not for profit".

Water is an irreplaceable life-sustaining resource, yet water scarcity is increasing and shortages are more frequent. More than 4700 litres of water are used to produce just 1 kg powdered breastmilk-substitute. Companies like Nestlé profit from the sale of infant formula and the sale of bottled water, but at what cost to the environment and child health?

8: Child health should always prevail over business interests.

Parents and policy-makers both need access to the best, most objective scientific evidence about infant feeding, rather than industry-funded research studies. Because of their obvious conflict of interest, the baby food industry has no place in health policy discussions, except to be held accountable for the harmful impacts of industrial accidents and for the nutritional inadequacy and bacterial and chemical contamination of their products.

9: Breastfeeding provides food security for infants and young children in emergencies and climate-related disasters.

Climate changes result in increasing global emergencies such as floods, droughts, fires and food shortages. Breastfeeding remains the best, most economical and safest food for infants during local and global disasters and emergencies, as long as mothers are supported.

10: When we strengthen Green Feeding practices by protecting and supporting mothers and breastfeeding, we are also protecting our air, water and land.

Breastfeeding is part of a safe, restorative and toxic-free circular economy that is based on biological cycles not extractive industries. Like other green priorities, supporting new parents with breastfeeding now will have benefits for future generations.

This advocacy document is the result of a collaborative effort by Penny van Esterik and Alison Linnear with the assistance of Britta Boutry and Rebecca Norton. We have all benefitted from on-going discussions with breastfeeding and climate change activists, but these are not official publications which have been reviewed and approved by all interested parties. They are intended as starting points to encourage other individuals and groups to integrate Green Feeding into their ongoing advocacy work on climate change.

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