

CHURCH INVESTMENT & BREAST MILK SUBSTITUTES

Some Questions & Answers

What are breast milk substitutes and why are they used?

Breast milk substitutes are foods that may be used in partial or total replacement of breast milk in the first 4-6 months of life and have been developed as nutritional equivalents to natural breast milk. There is a legitimate market for breast milk substitutes for women who cannot or choose not to breast-feed. Breast-feeding may not always be possible, for instance a woman may be ill or malnourished or an infant orphaned. There is also evidence that HIV can be transmitted through breast milk. Breast-feeding is recommended as best for baby in normal circumstances; ethical concerns have centred on the way these substitutes are marketed or promoted that may detract from women making an informed choice.

Are there any circumstances in which breast milk substitutes should not be used?

Breast milk substitutes are specially formulated to be a safe and nutritious equivalent to natural breast milk when correctly prepared. In certain circumstances they can result in malnourishment if powdered formulas are over diluted, dehydration if poorly mixed, and diarrhoeal infection from contaminated water or inadequately sterilised bottles and teats.

Is the marketing of breast milk substitutes regulated?

In 1981 the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF jointly recommended the introduction of an International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes that aimed to contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants. The Code acts as a voluntary guideline on the appropriate marketing of infant feeds, with compliance varying from country to country depending on individual national laws and regulations. Companies engaged in the sale of breast milk substitutes were asked to comply with the provisions contained within the Code. Companies are encouraged, and in some cases must state on packaging or marketing materials that under normal circumstances breast-feeding is best.

What does the Code cover?

The Code only applies to the marketing of breast milk substitutes, infant formula, and milk-based food and beverages such as bottle-fed complementary feeds. The Code generally applies to the first 4-6 months of life and does not extend to weaning and follow on foods, unless marketed as a breast milk substitute. It recommends that:

- *there should be no advertising or other form of promotion*
- *manufacturers should not provide free samples to pregnant women or mothers*
- *manufacturers should not make direct contact with pregnant women or mothers*
- *babies should not be depicted on infant formula packaging*

- *labels should be appropriate to the main or indigenous spoken languages*
- *promotional material should not be distributed to clinics and hospitals*

What is the Church of England's interest in the marketing of breast milk substitutes?

The Church of England's General Synod has stressed the importance of promoting infant and maternal health by all available means. Both the Synod and the Council for Mission and Public Affairs have taken a close interest in the responsible marketing of breast milk substitutes over many years, particularly in supporting ways of monitoring and responding to alleged breaches of the Code.

How have they done this?

The marketing of breast milk substitutes is complex, sensitive and controversial, with strongly held views on both sides. The Synod sent a clear message to governments, manufacturers and those working with mothers and babies of the value it attached to the life of all children and the pre-eminent importance of their well-being and health by calling for full compliance with the Code.

What role has the Ethical Investment Advisory Group adopted in supporting this approach?

The central investment institutions of the Church may be shareholders in companies that manufacture breast milk substitutes, and are aware of the concerns many have for the responsible marketing of these products. The Ethical Investment Advisory Group has therefore adopted the role of interlocutor for the Church as a positive response to these concerns.

What does this mean in practice?

The Group continues to monitor companies very closely, and meets with management to encourage full compliance with the Code. The Group and its member bodies are not campaigners but dialogue affords the opportunity to promote high standards and to put any alleged breaches raised by the Church to the companies concerned. This we believe is the most effective way of exercising responsible shareholder influence.

Would the EIAG recommend disinvestment if a company continually violated the Code?

In engaging with companies, the Group looks for principles of governance that fully meet responsibilities and obligations. As well as policies and processes, a clear commitment to investigate and mitigate alleged breaches is sought. Disinvestment remains the preserve of each of the Trustee bodies, and would only be recommended if in the Group's view a company persistently violated the Code or failed to respond to our concerns. Once a shareholding is sold, however the Church's influence is lost.



The Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group was established in 1994 and includes representation from the Church Commissioners for England, the CBF Church of England Funds, The Church of England Pensions Board, the General Synod, the Archbishops' Council, and the Council for Mission & Public Affairs

CCLA Investment Management Limited, SRI Unit, 80 Cheapside, London EC2V 6DZ
020 7489 6000 ethics@ccla.co.uk

January 2005 (revised)