Reviewer's report

Title: Protocol for a cluster-randomized trial to determine the effects of advocacy actions on the salt levels of processed foods

Version: 3 Date: 20 October 2015

Reviewer: Janelle Gunn

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. The tense issue is problematic. It's written as if this is something that is going to occur, but the time periods 2013-2015 already passed. Recommend writing it up as the methods/protocol but in the appropriate tense. Seen throughout and in particular on page 15, project status section
2. My understanding is that typical time to shelf for a re-engineer or reformulation is about two years. You may not see an impact, decrease in sodium mg Na/100 gm of food, due to policy efforts in your time period, another analysis at 6-12 months out might be useful.
3. Page 7, line 111, what about existing company R and D plans/strategy?
4. Add more detail on “baseline data” and also how baseline will be compared to future collections, will you be taking the mean of all available products (baseline + new market introductions)? will sales/popularity be a factor (sales weighted mean)?
5. Page 20, Clarify if additional data was systematic and included only if no interview or in all cases (company website, then xyz, then xyz)

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Is there an official name for the Australian dietary guidelines, consider using it for clarify page 2 and page 4 wording is slightly different
2. Table 1, “receivership” and “special foods” may not be common to the reader, add footnote definition
3. Figure 1, under excluded suggest providing numbers separately for #20 products, importers, and receivership
4. Line 89- define “other processing”
5. Page 10/11 add specifically how data is collected (company sends, researcher takes photos, etc).
6. Page 13, clarify at what time intervals quantitative outcomes are collected.
7. Line 43- insert addition of ‘excess’ salt, sugar

Discretionary Revisions
1. Consider rewording “positive” and “negative” in the abstract discussion/discussion.
2. Page 4, line 40, consumer demand is not acknowledged, consider adding the role consumer demand plays on food companies decisions
3. What potential impact is the experience and skill of the NGO. Consider more details
4. Line 49- “very high likelihood” awkward wording
5. Lines 331-334- consider addressing sooner in paper
6. Lines 346-347- consider addressing sooner in paper

Comments are those of the reviewers alone and do not represent the opinion of her employing agency.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests.