

Ref.: BEUC-X-2016-015/MGO/cm

22 February 2016

Re: BEUC manifesto for healthier recipes in the EU

Dear Attaché,

Today the EU Dutch Presidency is hosting a high level conference on food products' improvement in Amsterdam. Member States, industry and NGOs – including BEUC – are discussing how to improve consumers' diet by making the healthy choice the easy choice. Examples of national and European initiatives to reduce the amount of salt, added sugars and fat in food and drink are at the heart of discussions.

Many food and drink still contain very high levels of sugar, salt and fat. As a consequence consumers' diet contains too much of those nutrients which sends obesity rates through the roof. Being overweight and consuming an unhealthy diet fuel diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer epidemics we witness in Europe and worldwide.

Here are the actions that are key to help consumers have healthier diets:

Governments should set and monitor reduction targets and objectives. BEUC members' research has shown that you can ingest twice as much salt, sugar and fat depending on the chicken sandwich, frozen pizza or breakfast cereal you buy at the supermarket. That is because there are no legal limits and similar products end up with discrepant levels of salt, sugar and fat. Member States should lead and involve other stakeholders – including industry, consumer organisations, the WHO – in technical discussions to ensure that established targets are realistic.

Reduction targets should be mandatory, measurable, apply across all food categories and comply with WHO recommendations. Only under such conditions EU targets will be credible and effective. In particular we deem urgent to see endorsed across the EU a series of measures:

- The WHO target to achieve a 30% relative reduction of salt to limit salt intake to less than 5 grams per day by 2025;
- The WHO recommendation that no more than 10 % of calories in our diet should come from saturated fat;
- The reduction of added sugar consumption to less than 10 % of the total energy intake (i.e. 50 grams or 12 teaspoons) as a bare minimum, and ideally to aim for less than 5% of the total energy intake.

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As our taste buds need time to adapt, the targets should enable gradual reductions.

Slashing sugar, salt and fat levels should apply to whole ranges of products, not to just a few, if we are serious about tackling the obesity epidemic. Our French member UFC-Que Choisir found that a popular brand selling biscottes developed a "low in salt" category while the salt level of its conventional products increased by 20% between 2007 and 2013.

New products should be in line with reformulation policies. It does not make sense to claim reductions of sugar in food and at the same time to develop new items filled with added sugar and heavily marketed to kids. Our members' tests prove that we can still easily find in supermarkets breakfast cereals with more than 25gr of sugar per 100g of product.

Product improvement does not only mean less. It should also mean more. Because consumption of fruits and vegetables is still declining in the EU, reformulation strategies should look at increasing their share in food recipes. We need to help consumers increase their consumption of fruit, vegetables and healthy proteins.

Some areas require government lead, such as trans fatty acids. Even though many producers voluntarily removed trans fats from their products some food still contain very high levels of these harmful fats. Only an EU-wide law would ensure that all consumers, wherever they live and whatever they buy, are not exposed to trans fats.

Last year we were particularly pleased that [several food companies echoed our call for EU-wide legislation](#). We joined forces with four big food companies and three high profile NGOs and collectively called on the Commission to come up with a legislative proposal restricting the use of trans fats in foodstuff across the EU. Our call has been heard and the Commission is now expected to launch a formal impact assessment.

Healthier products are key but only half the story. We need **simple nutrition labelling** to help consumers compare foods (i.e. colour-coded schemes). We need a set **nutrient profiles** to make sure that food high in fat, sugar and salt does not bear health claims. We need more **commitments on marketing to children** and in particular we need to forbid advertising of unhealthy food in family programmes and better control online advertising, such as advertgames. We need to promote **healthy food environments** especially in schools and their neighbourhood but also in supermarkets. This would ensure that industry efforts on reformulation are replicated by retailers who would stop displaying food high in fat, sugar and salt at check-out counter and within the reach of children.

We need more government leadership, more ambition from all stakeholders and we need to translate promises into actions to make consumers' diets become healthier.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General

For more information, please refer to our 2015 position paper ["Informed food choices for healthier consumers"](#).