



The Consumer Voice in Europe

EU binding restrictions on trans-fatty acids

Letter sent to President J-C Juncker on April 20th, 2015

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Ref.: BEUC-X-2015-037 - 20/04/2015

Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker
President
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200

B – 1049 Brussels

Ref.: L2015_136/MGO/IPA/cm

Brussels, 20th April, 2015

Re: EU binding restrictions on trans-fatty acids

Dear President Juncker,

I write on behalf of The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), representing 40 national consumer associations from 31 countries to urge the European Commission to publish, without further delay, the report on the presence of trans fats in foods and in the overall diet of the European Union population as required by Regulation No. 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers.

In view of the publication of the report we wish to reiterate consumer organisations' support for EU-wide legal limits on the use of industrially produced trans fatty acids (IP-TFAs) in food stuffs.

EU binding restrictions on IP-TFAs:

▪ **Protect consumers health and reduce inequalities**

In the EU, even though the food industry has removed IP-TFAs from many food products, some foods still contain these harmful fats. This is corroborated by recent consumer research which found IP-TFAs in popular foods such as waffles, biscuits and margarine spreads, sometimes at very high levels¹. Lower socio-economic groups are particularly exposed to IP-TFAs, which contributes to health inequalities.

There is unanimous scientific evidence on the harmful effects of IP-TFAs, particularly on heart health. This is why the EU Food Safety Authority (EFSA) could not set a safe threshold and the World Health Organisation (WHO) called for IP-TFAs to be removed from the food supply altogether. Considering that heart disease is still the leading cause of death in the EU it is critical to make sure consumers are protected against IP-TFAs. The option of consuming IP-TFAs should not be left to consumers, who should be reassured that wherever they shop and whatever they buy, they will be offered IP-TFAs-free food.

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¹ [BEUC Position Paper, The consumer case for EU legal restrictions on the use of artificial trans-fats in food](#), BEUC, 2014.

- **Do not impact on food price and availability**

In Denmark the national law restricting the use of IP-TFAs to no more than 2 grams of IP-TFAs per 100 grams of fat did not lead to price increases. The availability of food was also not impacted and products characteristics, namely texture and taste, remained unchanged. As such, the Danish food industry endorsed the move². Restrictions on use were considered the best option by several EU countries who enacted legislation because IP-TFAs replacement is technically feasible and not costly for industry, while it greatly improves public health.

- **Create a level playing field for businesses**

EU-wide legal limits will help food businesses operate across the EU as they will have to comply with a single standard. It would also create a level playing field, therefore reassuring companies who have already made efforts to reformulate products that they will not be at a competitive disadvantage. This is all the more relevant knowing that several countries already put in place restrictions of use and more EU countries are expected to follow the same trend.

- **Offer legal certainty**

Considering that the European Commission is still analysing different policy options we would like to stress that legal limits are the only option to offer legal certainty to businesses and equal protection to all consumers. By contrast, labelling will not deliver consumer protection benefits and has been criticised as a burdensome measure by food industry bodies³. A voluntary approach has been favoured in the past fifteen years. Yet this means the food industry can decide what levels are tolerable, achievable and, as a result, IP-TFAs still lurk in several foods and put consumers' health at risk. Given that the majority of food businesses say they do not use IP-TFAs anymore, having the same restrictions as used on a voluntary basis enshrined in EU legislation should not be problematic.

We trust that you will take our views into account and we remain at your disposal for further discussion.

Kindly note this letter was also sent to Vice-President Katainen, First Vice President Timmermans, Commissioner Andriukaitis and Commissioner Bienkowska.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General

² Restriction of Produced Trans Fatty Acid Works Better Than Labelling – The Danish Experience, Forbrugerradet (The Danish Consumer Council), 2012.

³ European Commission staff working document on the results of the Commission's consultation with the Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health, September 2014.