



The Consumer Voice in Europe

WHO Europe Nutrient PROFILES

(BEUC Letter sent to Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab – Regional Director –
World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe on 21 April
2015)

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Ref.: BEUC-X-2015-039 - 22/04/2015

Ref.: BEUC-L-2015-142/MGO/cm

Brussels, 21 April 2015

Re: BEUC welcomes WHO Europe nutrient profile model to restrict marketing to children of unhealthy food

Dear Dr. Jakab,

I write on behalf of The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), representing 40 national consumer associations from 31 countries to congratulate the WHO Regional office for Europe on the publication of a nutrient profile model to reduce exposure of children to marketing of unhealthy food.

BEUC and its national members have long been advocating for strict criteria to be used to determine if a food can or cannot be marketed to children. Recent consumer research shows that unhealthy foods (i.e. foods high in sugar, salt and saturates and of low nutritional value) are still heavily marketed to children. Even more worrying, our members also found that foods marketed to children are usually healthier than food marketed to adults.

BEUC members' tests¹ repeatedly exposed very high levels of sugar and saturates in cereal bars marketed to children. At the same time these foods do not provide any essential nutrients and are low-nutrients. This is also the case for biscuits, cakes, ice-creams and confectionaries which usually get the worst grades in our member tests because they are empty calories products loaded with sugar, saturates and salt. This is why we firmly support WHO Europe's principle that marketing of such products should not be permitted.

Breakfast cereals are one of the main foods marketed to children. If marketed to children they must meet children needs and not provide too much sugar, salt and saturates. Unfortunately BEUC members found that the vast majority of breakfast cereals are full of sugar and of low nutritional value. Sugar usually accounts for a third and sometimes almost for half of these products. As such setting a reasonable threshold for sugar in breakfast cereals is particularly relevant. The maximum amount of 15 grams of sugar per 100 grams proposed by WHO Europe is very much welcome. Our members found breakfast cereals with less than 15 grams of sugar, proving reducing sugar levels in breakfast cereals is realistic and achievable.

¹http://www.beuc.org/publications/beuc-x-2015008_pca_beuc_position_paper_on_nutrition.pdf

Self-regulation and industry initiatives are welcome but they need to be based on strict and ambitious criteria. Right now the major EU initiative to reduce marketing of unhealthy food to children is led by food and drink businesses through the EU pledge. Even though this has led to some improvements, marketing of unhealthy food is still commonplace. If we are to tackle the childhood obesity epidemic we need to make sure industry initiatives are based on the best available recommendations. Now that WHO Europe proposed a single European set of nutritional guidelines to assess products on the basis of their nutrient content the EU pledge should be updated and embrace WHO Europe standards. The nutrient profile model should also be used as a basis for dialogue between the food industry and national governments, who should reaffirm their leadership and ask food businesses to use WHO Europe's nutrient profiles.

Again, we wish to congratulate WHO Europe for coordinating the work of expert groups in the past years and for publishing such an ambitious and high-quality set of nutrient profiles.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Goyens
Director General