

The Consumer Voice in Europe

EU CODE OF CONDUCT ON RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS AND MARKETING PRACTICES

BEUC statement delivered at a special working group meeting of
the Advisory Group on the Food Chain on 11th December 2020



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Special working group meeting of the Advisory Group on the “Code of Conduct for Responsible Business and Marketing Practices – 11th December 2020

Statement delivered by BEUC Director General, Monique Goyens

About the concept and objectives of the EU Code of Conduct

Making the healthy and sustainable food choice the easy option for consumers has been a long-standing motto of BEUC. A survey¹ we conducted last year found that even though two thirds of EU consumers are willing to eat more sustainably, price, lack of clear labelling, and a limited choice of sustainable options are major barriers in doing so.

The Farm to Fork Strategy rightly **recognises the importance of a “favourable food environment”** to make the healthy and sustainable choice easier for consumers. Yet, most of the legislative initiatives are still a long way ahead. Therefore – despite BEUC’s well-known reservations about self-regulation – **we see value in encouraging industry and retailers to move faster**. This is where the Code of Conduct can help, provided it is well designed and comes with a robust monitoring mechanism.

What does BEUC expect to see in the EU Code of Conduct?

There is a lot the food industry, retail and food service sectors can do to make the healthy and sustainable choice easier for consumers, incl.:

Food companies can make food healthier by design by reducing amounts of fat, sugar, and salt in their products, while adding more healthy ingredients (e.g., fruit, vegetables, and whole grain). They can also stop advertising unhealthy food to children, both offline and online, and use brand mascots and other cartoon characters that appeal to kids more responsibly.

Retailers can offer price discounts and use loyalty schemes to promote healthier and more sustainable choices in store (e.g., Belgian retailer offering discounts on products with a Nutri-Score ‘A’ or ‘B’). By replacing unhealthy snacks by healthier options at checkout areas and end-of-aisles, they can nudge consumers to purchase healthier products. Retailers can also promote more sustainable supply chains, e.g. by sourcing more organic food and sustainable seafood.

The food service sector can help consumers to shift to a more plant-based diet by offering a greater variety of healthy and tasty plant-based options on menus. It also has a role to play in fighting food waste by serving smaller portion sizes for example.

What do we need for a meaningful EU Code of Conduct?

Good things can be achieved provided commitments are **relevant to shaping a healthy and sustainable food environment**, are **specific, measurable and time bound**.

It is essential that **businesses focus on their key operations**: e.g., a commitment by a soft drink manufacturer will be more impactful and credible if it is about reducing sugar levels in its products than if it is about promoting physical activity among children.

¹ BEUC, [One bite at a time: consumers and the transition to sustainable food](#), An analysis of a survey of European consumers on attitudes towards sustainable food, June 2020.

The level of ambition of the commitments also **needs to be commensurate with the obesity, climate, and biodiversity emergencies** we are facing, and with societal expectations.

About the monitoring and impact of the EU Code of Conduct

A **robust monitoring mechanism to assess the relevance, implementation and impact of the commitments** will be key to the Code of Conduct's credibility and, ultimately, success. Such mechanism should be based on relevant and transparent indicators to be defined by all actors around the table, incl. NGOs and consumer groups, and should be followed up with any necessary improvements.

We see the Code of Conduct as a **useful starting point** on the EU's journey towards healthier and greener food. By giving them more visibility, the Code of Conduct can incentivise and reward the most responsible players for their efforts. Yet voluntary commitments can only get you so far – **the Code of Conduct cannot be a substitute for ambitious, binding rules to make the EU's food system sustainable.**

ENDS



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