



FINNISH FOOD MARKETING ASSOCIATION

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FINNISH FOOD MARKETING ASSOCIATION'S COMMENTS ON THE GREEN PAPER "PROMOTING HEALTHY DIETS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: A EUROPEAN DIMENSION FOR THE PREVENTION OF OVERWEIGHT, OBESITY AND CHRONIC DISEASES"

The members of the Finnish Food Marketing Association are companies and associations active in the grocery trade. The FFMA's members' share of the Finnish retail market for groceries is approximately 93%. The aim of FFMA is to improve common preconditions in the grocery trade field.

Overweight, obesity and chronic diseases raise a lot of questions and debate in Europe nowadays. The number of overweight people is increasing and the cost of chronic diseases plays a huge role in societies. The problem is recognized in Finland, too. In our opinion the European Community should consider taking the following issues into account when handling the problem:

Nutrition part of grocery trade's social responsibility

Grocery trade in Finland promotes a healthy diet and takes responsibility in nutrition. Grocery trade's mission is to offer consumers a wide and versatile selection of food products. To support a healthy diet it offers a selection of fresh products like fruits and vegetables. There are also available a vast selection of products low in fat, salt and sugar.

The information given in products by regulations gives the consumer a foundation of an informed dietary choice. Clear information about the nutrition content of products enables the consumer's choices to be based on facts. There are also symbols for example in Finland the Heart Symbol which helps to select healthy, low in fat and salt products.

In Finland grocery trade groups' customer magazines Pirkka, Yhteishyvä and Me reaches almost every consumer in Finland. They give out meal recipes which consider nutritional facts. Hence the recipes have a huge effect on national public health.

Companies in Europe implement corporate social responsibility. Their values highlight economic, environmental and social responsibility in every business activity. In Finland the biggest grocery trade companies have their own scheme of responsibility in every day's work. Hence the starting point should be the operators' self regulation in issues concerning nutrition. Therefore Community should encourage member states and operators to develop policies and standards.

Consumer's own responsibility

The starting point in work in nutrition field is that the consumer carries the responsibility of his/her choices. Therefore the consumer responsibility should be emphasised by the Community in its actions. Consumers have to be enlightened when it comes to issues with health and healthy lifestyle. The main responsibility for education lies with society.

Education and information

Schools are the most important actor in directing children and teenagers towards a healthy and active lifestyle. In schools young people are taught to make healthy choices concerning food. They also learn many sports and are encouraged to include them in their use of free time. In Finland, schools also provide children daily with healthy and nutritionally balanced food.

National Nutrition Council in Finland operates under the Ministry of Agriculture. Council's task is to monitor and to develop Finnish people's nutrition by making recommendations on nutrition, by proposing active measures and by monitoring execution and effects of those measures, by enhancing holistic nutritional risk assessment, by taking initiative and by taking positions on questions concerning people's nutrition and health considering the whole food chain from farm to fork, by monitoring the development of European nutritional policy, and by improving Council's external communications. National Nutrition Council's members are the ministries active on questions concerning nutrition, NGO's active in issues concerning consumer rights, counselling and health promotion, as well as Finnish associations of trade, food industry and agriculture. Participation of economic operators' associations ensures efficient flow of information between the Council and businesses. The Council publishes nutritional recommendations that are widely applied for instance in public sector's catering services.

Health-focused NGO's run many EU-financed nutritional campaigns. We consider it important that the European Community ensures that these NGO's actively seek participation of associations of businesses to these campaigns. Wide-ranging co-operation and efficient use of commerce's contacts with consumers would ensure a good coverage for these campaigns.

Value added tax in groceries

In Finland, the value added tax in groceries is 17 %. The aim of Finnish associations of trade and food industry is to reduce the tax to 12 %. Reducing the tax would benefit all parties but especially families with children and households with low income. Although the demand for food wouldn't increase as the prices fall but consumers would have an access to a much more versatile diet. It is estimated that especially the consumption of fruits and vegetables would increase. And also products with health claims would be accessible to a larger amount of people.

Reducing the trade barriers that affect the import trade could enhance the shelf availability and attractiveness of fruits and vegetables. A substantial and price competitive offering of fruits and vegetables naturally increases their consumption. Imports from third countries together with Community goods will complement the variety offered and hence further improve the appealing nature of the whole product group.

Products with health claims should be endorsed more easily. The simplification of endorsement would be helpful for smaller companies to get their products on market. The health claims should be based on adequate scientific evidence. Community should also direct research funds to the field.

With own-control system the grocery trade ensures that the products it offers to consumers are fresh and of high quality. Also the quality of fruits and vegetables is monitored with the own-control system. Finnish grocery trade uses an own-control manual, which has been prepared in close co-operation with the authorities. It includes the best practises of the whole trade and common understanding of the relevant legislation and it aims to unify the own-control systems in use.

The grocery trade works together with the relevant authorities and continuously aims to build a better partnership with the authorities in charge of the inspection. The law of the European Communities should be better targeted to examine the quality of the government inspections and the Commission should follow closely the quality and frequency of the inspections.

Yours sincerely

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