



**THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES RESPONSE
TO THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
CONSULTATION ON *PROMOTING HEALTHY DIETS AND PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY: A EUROPEAN DIMENSION FOR THE PREVENTION OF
OVERWEIGHT, OBESITY AND CHRONIC DISEASES***

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) is the UK's largest national voluntary organisation for women. It has some 215,000 members, in 7,000 Women's Institutes across England, Wales and the Islands. It is an educational, social and non-party political and non-sectarian organisation that particularly represents the views of women in rural communities.

The NFWI has a long-standing history of commitment to improving the nation's diet and health. Each year the NFWI passes a number of resolutions, which form the focus of its campaigning work. At the NFWI's AGM in 2003, WI members passed a mandate by an overwhelming majority, which states:

“This meeting views with concern the increase in obesity and diet-related health problems in children, and the associated risk of chronic disease in later life, and urges HM Government to regulate the promotion to children of foods that contribute to an unhealthy diet and to ensure increased opportunities for exercise and practical food education in schools.”

The NFWI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Commission's consultation on Promoting Healthy Diets and Physical Activity. The following are responses that the NFWI believes are relevant to the campaign work it has been doing over the past few years. The area of healthy eating and physical activity are at the forefront of WI members' minds. In addition to the above mandate from 2003, one of the resolutions being voted on at the NFWI 2006 AGM is on ensuring that the UK population remains healthy through physical activity. If this resolution is passed, the NFWI will be campaigning on this issue from June 2006.

CONSUMER INFORMATION, ADVERTISING AND MARKETING

When providing nutrition information to the consumer, what are the major nutrients, and categories of products, to be considered and why?

The NFWI has been a firm supporter of the UK Food Standards Agency's (FSA) voluntary front of pack signpost labelling scheme to help consumers see at a glance the fat, saturated fat, salt and sugars levels in foods sold through retail outlets. According to research commissioned by the FSA, these four nutrients give consumers information about the healthiness of their food

and do not overload consumers with too much information which could lead to confusion. Consumers want and need a nutritionally-based system they can trust that will allow them to choose healthier options and to decide realistically how often they can eat foods which are high in fat, sugar or salt, within an overall healthy diet.

The NFWI would like to see the FSA's front of pack signpost labelling scheme adopted throughout the EU to both help consumers make healthy choices and give them a clear and consistent message.

Which kind of education is required in order to enable consumers to fully understand the information given on food labels, and who should provide it?

There should be an initial government led education campaign on food labelling and importance of a healthy diet and physical activity with further assistance from industry and retailers, and consumer organisations to help follow up the importance of this message with consumers.

Are voluntary codes (“self-regulation”) an adequate tool for limiting the advertising and marketing of energy-dense and micronutrient-poor foods? What would be the alternative to be considered if self-regulation fails?

The NFWI believes that in order for industry to comply with limiting advertising and marketing of energy-dense and micronutrient-poor foods standards must be made mandatory. A recent report published by Sustain and partially funded by the NFWI, entitled *The Children's Food Bill – Why we need a new law, not more voluntary approaches*, makes clear industry's reluctance to follow voluntary approaches and the need for mandatory standards.

How can effectiveness in self-regulation be defined, implemented and monitored? Which measures should be taken towards ensuring that the credulity and lacking media literacy of vulnerable consumers are not exploited by advertising, marketing and promotion activities?

In the UK monitoring of advertising, marketing and promotion activities of less healthy foods will be conducted by Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, using the FSA's nutrient profiling model, which is a 'simple scoring' system, whereby points are allocated on the basis of the nutritional content in 100g of a food or drink, and foods are categorized into healthier, less healthy or somewhere in between to be used to define foods.

Appointed bodies such as this could be chosen in each Member State to oversee and monitor the advertising, marketing and promotion activities of less healthy foods, particular to those vulnerable groups such as children. This nutrient profiling model could be adopted by all Member States for monitoring advertising, marketing and promotion activities of less healthy food and drinks.

CONSUMER EDUCATION

How can consumers best be enabled to make informed choices and take effective action?

As stated above, the FSA's front of pack signpost labelling scheme helps consumers make informed choices by enabling them to see at a glance whether foods are healthier or less healthy. A clear and consistent labelling format like the FSA's front of pack signpost labelling scheme, coupled with a government led education campaign will enable consumers to make informed choices about the foods they eat.

What contributions can public-private partnerships make toward consumer education?

An education campaign that helps inform consumers about healthy diets and how they can use food labelling to make healthy choices should be government led. However, manufacturers and retailers will need to ensure that their products' labelling remains clear and consistent so as not to confuse consumers. In addition the government led campaign should be backed by manufacturers' and retailers' in-store and out-of-store advertising to ensure that consumers receive a consistent message from all parties.

A FOCUS ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

What are good examples for improving the nutritional value of school meals, and how can parents be informed on how to improve the nutritional value of home meals?

The NFWI would like to see nutrient-based standards based on the Caroline Walker Trust recommendations in all schools (please see www.cwt.org.uk). If these recommendations are introduced on a statutory basis they will likely lead to a dramatic improvement to the nutritional quality of school meals. The NFWI believes that nutrient standards should **not** be relaxed and that they present an excellent opportunity to provide children with a healthy start in life.

The NFWI would also like to see food made from fresh and seasonal ingredients and cooked on site, as these will have a greater natural nutrient content. It will also help ensure that children become accustomed to eating fresh food. In addition, the NFWI has been particularly concerned with the lack of support for local farmers and the resultant food miles which are associated with imported foods and therefore would like to see more fresh and seasonal ingredients used, and supplied by local farmers.

In addition, WI members have been involved in many after school and evening cookery programmes teaching children and parents how to cook simple, healthy meals. One of these programmes includes Get Cooking in Wales which is sponsored by FSA Wales. Such programmes could be rolled

out across the EU using various groups of individuals who have the expertise in preparing healthy meals.

School Governors also have a role to play in helping to ensure that the nutritional value of school meals is improved and they can help initiate programmes on helping to inform parents on how to improve the nutritional value of home meals.

What is good practice for fostering healthy dietary choices at schools, especially as regards the excessive intake of energy-dense snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks?

The NFWI believes that although dietary choice at school is important, energy-dense snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks should not be permitted in schools for children to consume.

IN CONCLUSION

The NFWI has been a strong supporter of the Children's Food Bill in the UK. This Bill seeks to ensure that all children - whatever their background - benefit from food environments which encourage healthy eating, thereby reducing health inequalities, childhood obesity and many other illnesses which are linked to unhealthy diets.

The NFWI is pleased to see that the European Commission is looking at ways of promoting healthy lifestyles and better nutrition within the European Union. The UK has been making steps towards encouraging healthy eating and physical activity as we are sure many other Members States are. It is important to look at what is currently being done and what can be done to further ameliorate the health of the European population and work together by bringing successful initiatives forward to help the European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health look into a wide range of policies.

Yours sincerely,



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