

Re: Consultations on the Green Paper Obesity
Contribution Netherlands Nutrition Centre

31 March 2006

Lectori Salutem

It gives me great pleasure to send you, as a contribution to the consultations on the Green Paper 'Promoting healthy diets and physical activity', a copy of the Netherlands Nutrition Centre's master plan for the prevention of obesity: *The Netherlands in Balance*. The Netherlands Nutrition Centre believes there is an urgent need for this type of comprehensive European strategy and we hope our plan will inspire the Commission.

Taking coherent and comprehensive action targeted simultaneously (!) on the various determinants, is the essence of our plan. The first results of the implementation in the Netherlands can now be seen and are positive.

Our plan serves as an outline and has to be completed, within the subsidiarity principle, with national actions and interventions that fit in local systems, markets, habits and law. A structural and continuous effort is necessary during the coming years.

For a number of reasons, we favour an EU-role in addition to our national activities:

- the health issue is apparent in all member states: potentially significant role for the EU to add to the solution
- the WHO stresses a shared approach, we refer to their arguments
- the food industry outstretches national borders
- many determinants are shared by member states
- effectivity and cost gains by sharing best practices
- added value to EU-image
- existing EU involvement in food labelling and nutritional profiles
- pressure to ensure sufficient and structural attention and funding

European logo

Since (too) many and therefore misunderstood logos seem to pop up, a central coordinative role for the Commission would be welcomed. To stimulate your thinking we include a prototype. We could assist you (or EFSA) with -EU-wide applicable- categorising tools to distinguish healthy from unhealthy food products.

Role EU and budgetary consequences

The Commission can play an important role in agenda setting and coordinating actions by unifying criteria and approaches, stimulating science, possibly food law and regulatory measures. European budgets (apart from funding of research and committee work) seem unnecessary. Nationally a lot of efforts (and matching funding) are already undertaken but scattered, ill coordinated or executed. We would make a plea for structural and coherent action: even with available budgets the impact and effectivity could be greatly improved at a national level.

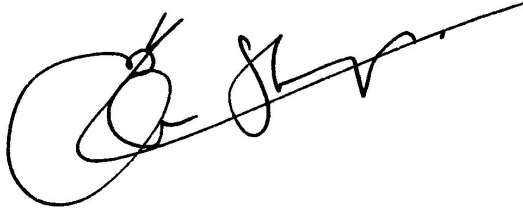
The Netherlands Nutrition Centre

The Netherlands Nutrition Centre is an independent foundation that aims to increase insight into food quality and to stimulate consumers to eat healthy and safely. Ultimately, the goals are consumers who make conscious, informed choices, and improved (food based) health for all. We are a publicly funded organisation that is primarily charged

with providing consumers with trustworthy information, organising campaigns designed to effect behavioural change, and contributing to the furthering and stimulation of discourse contributing to the aim, within the academic and business communities, government, politics and the general public.

The Centre is, within budgetary limits, very successful and effective in reaching out to the Dutch consumers, highly regarded by them and trusted. It would be advisable to consider the introduction of organisations with a similar form and function in member states in order to cope with broad nutritional issues like the obesity problem. Similar institutions nowadays don't exist outside the Netherlands.

We would be more than happy to participate in the Commission's activities for example by a contribution to the 'Platform on Health, Diet and Physical Activity', preferably by a membership of this forum.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne E.C. van Sluys', written in a cursive style.

Yvonne E.C. van Sluys, MSc.
Director Netherlands Nutrition Centre

The Preventing Obesity Master Plan (summary)

In our view overweight must be tackled primarily through preventive action.

This involves conscious choices on the part of consumers on the one hand, and an environment that stimulates healthy behaviour on the other. In our plan we refer to these two aspects as 'Energy-conscious consumers' and 'Energy-conscious countries' respectively.

Four programmes

Obesity prevention should cover four fields that complement and strengthen one another.

"Push and pull" mechanisms are applied to multiply effects and to 'make the effectivity wheel rotate'.

1. Energy-conscious consumers

Constant agenda setting aimed at the entire population designed to promote awareness and knowledge about the importance of a healthy weight and energy balance, to keep the subject 'top of mind' with consumers and stakeholders.

Goal: empowered citizens who make conscious, well informed choices.

Attractive wide-scale public campaigns, addressing problem and solutions are the prime action.

2. Energy-conscious consumers, specific target groups

Certain segments of society prove to be at greater risk of becoming overweight. This programme identifies six groups, including children and people with a low socio-economic status, and specifically addresses their social surroundings and habits.

3. Energy-conscious country, general

This programme focuses on the 'obesogenic environment' in which today's consumers live with an overwhelming number of daily, low cost, 'eat' temptations. Topics include the supply and composition of (food industry) products, labelling information, hallmarks, portion size, role of retail and marketing techniques. Engaging in collaboration and dialogue with trade and industry are important actions. Regulatory actions by government are mandatory if voluntary action of parties fails to show effect.

4. Energy-conscious country, specific settings

The fourth programme addresses a trio of specific settings that play an important role in maintaining the energy balance: school, work and neighbourhood. Programmes focus on school education (all levels), school and work place catering, neighbourhood activities directed at low social classes (high risk groups) and i.e. licensing conditions for fast food outlets etc.

How does the 'push and pull' mechanism work with respect to these programmes:

Firstly: Yearly we execute 2-3 mass media 'bursts', TV-commercials with underlying materials: website-info, brochures, gadgets (i.e. nice waist circumference measuring tapes).

Goal:

- to create awareness,
- to pass on knowledge (on health related risks, normal daily caloric need etc.),
- stimulate information-seeking (millions visiting our website and internet based tools)
- get the topic 'top of mind' with all stakeholders,
- to add pressure on consumers to act,
- to stakeholders to act
- and to keep on reminding them.

Secondly and simultaneously we start an active dialogue with all stakeholders involved:

- with **food industry** (portion size, advertising and marketing methods, labelling, use of logo's, use of sugars and fats etc.) individual companies and branch representatives
- with **retailers** (use of their buying power to make suppliers aware and adapt formulas, labelling; supermarket- promotions itself, free info in retailers' magazines, shelf-policy etc.)
- **caterers** (work place and school catering: product placement, enough healthy alternatives, price policy 'healthy cheaper/subsidized i.e. by employer, recognisability of healthy/unhealthy foods etc)
- **restaurants, fast food and take-aways** (e.g. use of healthier ingredients, transparency on caloric load, offering alternatives, vegetables)
- **municipalities** (licensing policies for fast food outlets etc., local health care and youth health, schools and education)
- **politicians** (on their stimulating/funding role, inclusion in party-programmes)
- **government** (funding, central direction of the issue, inclusion in health policy documents for parliament and health programmes, more focus on life style and prevention, when necessary: regulations/food law adaptations)
- **science** (development of effective interventions, study consumer behaviour, add to/psychology/sociology/taste, data + interpretation, repair lacking knowledge i.e. also on how to compose a good tasting product with less fat, sugar etc.)
- **schools** (education, offering effective learning methods, school catering, combination of gymnastic exercise with food education i.e. posing questions: how long do you have to gym/swim/bike etc. to burn a portion of French fries etc to create knowledge on energy balance aspects)
- **health professionals** (MD's, dieticians, specialists to stimulate preventive action, information transferral i.e. by handing out our brochures)

Thirdly: in program 2 and 4 we run additional activities together with local workers (school teachers, health professionals, social workers etc) and institutions. Furthermore we have an official collaboration with institutes that promote physical activity and always link the 'eat conscious and exercise enough' messages in all our materials and actions.

This coherent approach brings all necessary players to move in the right direction and will have a multiplied impact is our strong belief. The design proves its validity in daily practice in The Netherlands.

Annexe 2: EU Logo

Annexe 3: Master plan: The Netherlands in Balance

Copies:

**Platform on Health, Diet and Physical Activity, to the attention of Robert Madelin, Director General SANCO
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Netherlands, to the attention of Hans de Goeij, Director General.**

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