Report

Roundtable on Obesity
Workshop on Best Practice
29 October 2004

The European Commission’s Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection organised a Workshop on Best Practice on 29 October 2004 in the framework of the Obesity Round Table process. Following the first meeting of the Round Table of 20 July 2004, the purpose of the workshop was to present a wide range of best practice in the various areas relevant for obesity prevention, and thus prepare the ground for reaching agreement amongst the Round Table participants on concrete action to be taken. Chaired by Robert Madelin, Director General, and Paula Testori Coggi, Director, the workshop brought together leading representatives of consumer organisations, NGOs, the European food industry, retailers, the advertising industry, the vending machines industry, the fast food industry, the World Health Organisation, academia and EU Member States (list of participants attached). Practical conclusions of the workshop will be drawn at the next Round Table meeting of 18 November 2004.

The workshop was structured into three sessions, dedicated to

- Consumer information and education; labelling
- Advertising, promotion and marketing
- Product development, product composition

All presentations are available on the Health & Consumer Protection Directorate General’s web site:

Session 1: Consumer information and education; labelling

The first four presentations of this session were about the information provided to consumers on food packages.

Lisbeth Kohls, Vice President Quality, Environment and consumer Affairs, ICA Grocery Retail Group, Sweden, Symbols on food labels: A Retail perspective of the Green Keyhole symbol.
Mike Rayner, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group, Symbols on food labels: the Traffic Light System.

Pekka Puska, National Public Health Institute, Finland, Symbols on food labels: Heart logo for “heart-healthy” products

Catherine Humphries, Chief Scientific Advisor, EuroCoop, New-look nutrition panels in practice

Kohl and Puska presented two different kinds of symbols indicating that a particular product is a “healthy” choice. Puska’s main message was that whatever symbol is chosen it is important to standardise it so it is recognisable for the consumers. Rayner presented the “traffic light system”, which helps to enable the consumer to judge what is “more” and what is “less healthy”. Humphries’ presentation touched upon consumer research and gave concrete examples and recommendations at European level.

Olivier Andrault, Consommation, Logement et Cadre de Vie, France; Perception of nutrition labelling – results of a survey in France presented a summary of a French research project on what kind of information the consumer can get out of nutrition labelling, identifying causes that hinder the reading of nutrition labelling.

Erik Harms, German multi-stakeholder campaign “Platform Nutrition and Physical Activity”


These two presentations are examples of education approaches involving a very wide range of stakeholders. The German “Platform Nutrition and Physical Activity” is a new nation-wide project involving the food industry, the Ministry for Consumer Protection, Nutrition and Agriculture, the German Sports Federation, the German Parents Association, the German Society of Pediatrics, the Trade Union for the food and hospitality industry and the federation of German sickness insurance schemes. The “Platform” was established in September this year and is therefore still in its beginnings. The Fleurbaix-Laventie project has a similarly broad multi-stakeholder approach, but is a mature implemented at local level. It has been evaluated and showed encouraging results. The project will now be extended to ten bigger French cities.

In the discussions on this item, a number of participants regretted that the presentations did not place enough emphasis on physical activity. The role of nutrition labelling as a tool for influencing consumer food choices was highlighted. There was broad agreement that there is a need for providing clear and meaningful information to the consumer on food labels, that such information should be short and comprehensive and that it should be presented in a format that is sufficiently harmonised to keep the market open and flexible enough to allow rapid response to evolving consumer needs. The intended revision of the nutrition labelling rules was welcomed, even more so as improving the presentation of the information appears sometimes to be hampered by existing legal provisions. The advantages and disadvantages of certain voluntary initiatives for the presentation of foods in ways that would facilitate consumer choices (e.g. signposting/traffic lights, symbols like the “key hole” and the “healthy heart”) were outlined.

Regarding general consumer (and children’s) education, there was broad agreement on the need for multi-stakeholder campaigns, in which the relevant stakeholders agree on (and are prepared to invest in) a coherent and comprehensive approach. Consistent messages should be given from a wide range of players over a longer span of time and local stakeholders play an active role (schools, restaurants, shops, local food
The focus should be on replacing “obesogenic” environments by environments which make it easier for the consumer to make “healthy” nutrition choices and practice physical activity.

**Session 2 Advertising, promotion and marketing**

Niels Christiansen, Chair CIAA Diet Task Force, *Principles of food and beverage advertising*: This presentation explained the food industry’s approach to food and beverage advertising. The general principles, which have now been in use for more than a year, were outlined.

Stephan Loerke, Managing Director, World Federation of Advertisers, *Effectiveness of self-regulation in advertising*: This presentation focused on the importance of self-regulation and described the MediaSmart campaign (aimed at developing children’s media literacy) as a good example for collaboration between advertisers and schools. The originally UK based campaign will now be extended to France and Belgium.

Aude L’hirondel, Food Policy Officer, EuroCoop, *Consumer empowerment and responsible advertising*: This presentation outlined the great imbalance between the food industry’s spending on advertising, and public health authorities’ spending on information on healthy lifestyles. Moreover, it underlined the need to define a healthy, balanced diet and educate the population through channels like schools, workplaces, media etc. The need for responsible advertising to children was emphasised, as well as the fact that EuroCoop UK has a voluntary ban on advertising for food high in fat, sugar and salt in place since 2000.

Gillian White, Business Development Manager, Masterfoods/European Vending Association, *"Vending Best Practice"*: This presentation recognised concern about vending in context of obesity discussion and underlined the fact that schools are the decision makers when it comes to determining the choice in content of vending machines, the branding on the machines and the location of machines. Examples of best practice in various countries (incl. not vending in primary schools) were presented.

Gerard Hastings, Prof. Stirling University, UK, *Effects of food advertising on children*: This presentation gave a summary of the report “Review of Research on the Effects of Food promotion to Children” prepared for the Food Standards Agency in September 2003. It underlined that food is very often central in advertising and that advertised diets differ drastically from recommended diets. The research showed that exposure to food promotion influences children’s purchasing (strong evidence) and consumption behaviour (modest evidence), and that the effects of food promotion on children work at a brand and a category level.

Sue Davies, Principi Advisor, Consumers’ Association, UK; *Parents’ view on marketing of foods to children*: This presentation summarised the results of face to face interviews with parents having children between ages 3 and 12. Most parents agreed that advertising and promotions make it difficult for parents to insist that their children eat healthier foods, that there is far too much advertising of convenience food or drink to children, that there should be more advertising of healthy foods, and that there should be a ban on advertising of ‘convenience foods’ during children’s TV viewing hours.

Pierre de Ginestel, Quality Director, Auchan, France, The National Nutrition and Health Plan in France (PNNS): *How can retailers support national nutrition campaigns?*: This presentation described Auchan’s cooperates with the national government in the framework of the French National Nutrition Health Programme, and outlined the
company’s training schemes for employees and local associations, and programmes for schools.

In the discussion, some participants stressed that there was no difference between the diets of obese children and normal weight children, and that obesity is mainly about an imbalance between energy intake and physical activity. Some participants argued that self-regulation is in place and already working well, and that the effects of advertising on children’s diets are not scientifically established. Others tended to see advertising to children, especially for energy-dense products, as a major element of the “obesogenic” environment.

**Session 3 Product development, product composition:**

Niels Christiansen, Chair CIAA Diet Task Force, *Innovation in product development:* This presentation summarised examples for “healthy” product developments reduced in fat, cholesterol, sugar salt and portion size), and explained the process of research-based food development.

Ingemar Hjelm, EuroCoop, *Product development: Practical examples of alternative products with reduced fat, sugar and salt and of true claims based on nutrition criteria:* This presentation General summarised EuroCoop’s approach to diet and nutrition, gave concrete examples of products with reduced fat and salt, underlined the importance of nutrition profiles as a key step in the development of alternative « healthy » products and made policy recommendations.

Sue Davies, Consumers’ Association, UK, *Comparison of different breakfast cereals:* This presentation gave the results of a study on about 100 breakfast cereals in the UK, which were compared for fibre, sugar, salt and saturated fat content, using the Food Standards Agency’s guidelines for what is ‘a little’ and ‘a lot’. Given the great proportion of breakfast cereals high in sugar, fat and salt identified in the research, the presentation called for a simplified labelling scheme to help easily identify foods high in fat, sugar and salt and for restrictions on the advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt during children’s viewing times.

Breda Mitchell, Tesco, UK, *New Product Development - A Retail Perspective:* This presentation stated that retailers have retailers responded to consumers’ requirements by making convenience eating healthier eating, by focusing on price and expanding choice in value ranges for healthy foods and by simplifying product labelling.

Roland Higgins, Secretary General, European Modern Restaurant Association, *Innovative approaches on product development and consumer information:* This presentation summarised the Association’s social responsibility in view of the obesity pandemic, its contribution to educating about balanced lifestyles and its objective to provide tasty, convenient and “fun” nutritious food choices for the customers.

In the discussion, while recognising that a broad range of products reduced in energy, fat, sugar and salt are available, some participants pointed to the enormous differences of nutrient composition in similar products, suggesting that a lot more can be done in this vein.

Finally, participants confirmed one more time that operational conclusions from the workshop would be drawn at the Obesity Round Table of 18 November.
Annex A

Participants of the Workshop on Best Practice – Roundtable on Obesity Meeting

**Economic operators:**

CIAA: MARTIN Jean, President
DESTIN Raymond, Director General
CHRISTIANSEN Niels, President of diet, health and physical activity task force, Vice President public affairs Nestlé
MARTINEZ Julie, Manager Scientific and Regulatory affairs

Euro Commerce:

VONTHRON Noëlle, Adviser of the Food Policy Committee
KOHLS Lisbeth, Vice President Quality, Environment and Consumer Affairs, ICA Sweden
De GINESTEL Pierre, Quality Director Auchan France
MITCHELL Breda, Head of Consumer Law Tesco
LEGLISE Pascal, Chairman of the Food Quality Committee of FEDIS

European Modern Restaurants: HIGGENS Roland, Secretary General
CASTRO MARTINEZ Paloma, Senior Manager Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs, McDonald Europe

European Vending Association: RYDEN Nicole
WHITE Gillian, Business Development Manager Masterfoods

World Federation of Advertisers: LOERKE Stephan, Managing Director
WILL Gilroy, communications manager

**Consumer Organisations/NGOs:**

BEUC: MURRAY Jim, Director, Brussels, BE
KETTLITZ Beate, Food Policy Advisor, Brussels, BE
SUTTON Patrick, Food Policy Advisor
Consumers’ Association UK: DAVIES Sue, Principal Policy Advisor

Euro Coop: L’HIRONDEL Aude, Food Policy Officer, Brussels, BE
HUMPHRIES Dr. Catherine, Chief Scientific Advisor, Co-operative Group UK
HJELM Ingemar, Coop Sweden

European Heart Network: KESTENS Marleen, Network Coordinator (replacing Ms Susanne Logstrup)
RAYNER Dr. Mike, Oxford University

German Consumer Foundation
“Stiftung Warentest”: KAFTAN Vera, Head of Health and Nutrition Department, Berlin, DE, excused

UK Food Commission: LOBSTEIN Tim, Director, London, UK, excused

International Obesity Task Force: Neville Rigby, Director of Policy and Public Affairs

Standing Committee of European Doctors (CMPE) MACARA Alexander (excused)

Stirling University, UK: HASTINGS Gerald, Professor, Department of Marketing

**National Projects/Schemes:** ANDRAULT Olivier, Consommation, Logement et Cadre de Vie
BORYS Jean-Michel, Association Fleurbaix-Laventie
HARMS Erik, Professor, Plattform Ernährung und Bewegung
LANGGUTH Susanne, Stellvertretende Vorsitzende PEB

**EU Presidencies**
Netherlands DORTLAND Rob, Director, Department for Nutrition, Health Protection and Prevention, Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.
Luxembourg: BLAU Sarah,
REUTER Anner-Marie, Dieteticienne, Direction de la Sante
UK:

**Member States:**
Prof PUSKA Pekka, National. Publ. Health Institute, Finland
CHAULIAN, Ministry of Health, France
DOUGHAN Laurence, Ministry of Health, Belgium
THERKEL JENSEN Jens, Danish Food and Veterinary Administration
**World Health Organisation:**
TUKUITONGA Colin, Coordinator, Primary Prevention of Chronic Diseases, WHO, Geneva, CH
MARTIN John, Director, WHO, Brussels, BE

**European Commission:**
MADELIN Robert Director General, European Commission, Health and Consumer Protection (SANCO)
TESTORI COGGI Paola Director SANCO D
MATHIOUDAKIS Basil Acting Head of Unit SANCO D4
KAMPHAUSEN Wilfried SANCO C4
SKAR Mariann SANCO C4
LEE Helen SANCO D4
DUNCAN Benjamin SANCO A4