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Conclusions of the joint meeting of the Member States meeting jointly with the Advisory Group on Fruit and Vegetables and the School Fruit Scheme Experts Group

Brussels, 28 March 2012

The third meeting of the extended "Stakeholder's group" took place on 28 March 2012, bringing together representatives of Member States with the Advisory Group on Fruit and Vegetables and for the first time with the participation of the School Fruit Scheme (SFS) Experts Group.

The agenda of the meeting focused on the administration and implementation of the SFS, with a particular emphasis on the results of the first evaluation of SFS functioning in Member States, as well as on the stakeholders' perspective with updates on the consumption of fruit and vegetables and presentation of practical experience of different stakeholders (parents, directors) with the Scheme.

The joint meeting has come to the following conclusions.

1. As regards the administration and implementation of the SFS, the joint meeting:

- Welcomed the significant improvements in the functioning of the Scheme and in particular the major improvements in the use of allocated funding in its second year of application 2010/2011. Compared to the first year of application where the use of funds reached only 37%, the success rate in 2010/2011 is much higher and currently stands at around 65%.
- It is in particular encouraging that the Scheme's coverage has extended and that more than 8 million children benefited from it with 54.000 schools participating, which is an increase of around 70% compared to the figures of 2009/2010. This shows that the SFF is gaining in momentum with each year of application.
- The joint meeting warmly welcomed the creation of the SFS Experts Group which will assist the Commission in following the latest developments in regard to science, provide advice and help to the Commission in its tasks of the monitoring and evaluation of the SFS.
- Was informed about the work carried out in updating and putting in place the website on SFS, which is considered as a key tool in the dissemination of information, including on best practices.
- Took note of the state of play concerning the ongoing work on the external evaluation of the Scheme and the timetable for the Commission report to the Council and the EP concerning the SFS implementation (due to be presented by the end of 2012).

2. Concerning the implementation of the SFS in Member States, the major part of the joint meeting was devoted to the presentation of results of the first evaluations carried out in

Member States concerning the implementation and effectiveness of the SFS. The general conclusions of the first results could be summarised as follows:

- The results of the evaluation exercise at the national level are in general very positive and encouraging. They show that the Scheme is very popular and appreciated by children, teacher and parents alike. There is an overwhelming support for Scheme's continuation and it was assessed that SFS has a strong potential to positively influence and change the eating habits of children towards consuming more fruit and vegetables for the future.
- Some criticisms and shortcomings in the implementation were identified and they mostly relate to the administrative burden of implementation, on-the-spot logistical/organisational difficulties and to the constraints in securing financing at the national level.
- It was identified that the evaluation reports varied greatly as regards their structure and content which does not allow for the comparison of information provided. It was proposed that the Commission, together with its SFS Experts Group, should develop further guidelines for the evaluation of SFS at the national level.
- It was emphasised that there is a need to increase the visibility and provide more and better targeted information about the SFS to schools, parents and wider public which is considered to be presently insufficient.
- The importance of accompanying measures was stressed, in particular their potential in changing the behaviour, knowledge and awareness of children and parents alike.
- The joint meeting took note of the different experiences in MS when it comes to the targeting of SFS. Certain evaluations show that the implementation of the SFS is easier in terms of logistics and timing for certain age groups (e.g. primary schools in FR compared to the secondary), while others show particularly positive influence of SFS on children for socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, it was evident from the discussion that the SFS should target this group but it should not be restricted to it in order to avoid stigmatisation of schools they attend. Furthermore, MS emphasised the difficulties in establishing criteria to precisely identify these groups and schools.

3. From the stakeholder's perspective, a number of comments were made concerning the health benefits of eating fruit and vegetables and about the role of different stakeholders in the SFS implementation:

- The role and importance of SFS in increasing in a sustainable manner the consumption of fruit and vegetables by school children was acknowledged. This is in turn expected to have clear and positive health benefits.
- The joint meeting warmly welcomed the presentations of the representatives of parents and school directors which provided a valuable insight into their first-hand experience in dealing with the SFS. In general it was assessed that different actors and stakeholders (in particular parents, local producers, local community in general etc) should be involved more systematically in the SFS planning and implementation, in particular through accompanying measures.

4. The next meeting:

- The stakeholder group agreed that the next meeting should take place more or less at the same time next year which would allow taking stock of the situation after the publication of the external SFS evaluation and the Commission Report to the Council and the EP.