

TWELFTH MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

12TH OF MAY 2011 10.00-17.00

Minutes

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION

Mrs Despina Spanou, Chair, welcomed the participants of the 12th HLG meeting and highlighted food reformulation and in particular Member States' plans in this area against the agreed Framework, as the main topic of this HLG meeting.

The Chair mentioned the multi-stakeholder dinner debate, which took place the day before the HLG meeting, hosted by CIAA (Confederation of the food and drink industries of the EU). The dinner was an opportunity to emphasise recent progress by Europe's food manufacturers in reformulating food and drink products.

2. PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS OF EU AGRICULTURAL POLICY

2.1. THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY AFTER 2013 AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION SCHEMES IN AGRICULTURE POLICY TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Hermanus Versteijlen, Director for the single Common Market Organisation for agricultural products, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, presented three schemes managed by DG Agriculture and Rural Development related to Public Health.

School Fruit Scheme

The main objectives of the Scheme are to place nutrition, health and agriculture as permanent features of school curricula. It is crucial to start this kind of campaigns early at age when eating habits are being established. The long term goal is to achieve a life long permanent increase in consumption of fruit and vegetables which would finally contribute to the fight against obesity.

The Scheme is also intended to link agriculture and environment with school children, encourage public education, health and agriculture authorities to work together, involve stakeholders, schools, agriculture and trade, highlight seasonality and local produce.

The Scheme is composed of three parts developed in parallel:

- purchase and distribution of F&V in schools,
- accompanying obligatory measures, consisting of joint programmes/strategy between agriculture, education and health authorities with no EU co-financing,
- monitoring, evaluation and information activities.

This is the second year of implementation of the School Fruit Scheme and 24 Member States are participating with only Sweden, Finland and the United Kingdom opting out. The Scheme reached 4.7 million children, which is 18.3% of the target group. The majority of the Member States have chosen to restrict the target group to 6-10 years old children. Fruits are in most cases distributed in the frequency of one portion/child/week and are mostly of seasonal, local and EU origin. Data show that fruits and vegetables preferred by children are apples, pears, oranges, clementines, apricots, strawberries, bananas, carrots, tomatoes and cucumbers.

The implementation of the scheme has encountered some problems such as: little involvement of the sector in some cases (some traders refuse to supply small villages), schools not sufficiently aware of the scheme, national or regional co-financing difficulties.

School Milk Scheme

This scheme was first established in 1983 used mostly as an outlet of milk market. Aid was linked to the fat content and therefore dominated by fatty products.

Objectives of the scheme are to encourage consumption of healthy dairy products among children, teach children at an early age about healthy lifestyle and healthy eating (as in the School Fruit Scheme) and, finally, to fight against obesity.

Currently the new system has been in place since 1/8/2008: with innovative and more attractive products - various types of drinking milk, certain fermented milk products with fruit or fruit juice, plain fermented milk products, wide range of flavoured and non-flavoured cheeses, lactose free milk drinks. Member States have the possibility to choose the products they wish to distribute from the list of eligible products and also have the possibility to apply stricter standards than those set out in the Community list.

The level of aid is 18.15€/100kg for all types of drinking milk with maximum subsidized quantity: 0.25 litre milk / pupil / school day. Aid is independent of fat content, which de facto means higher aid for low fat products.

In the 2009/2010 school year 313 562 tons of dairy products were distributed in 26 Member States to about 18.8 million pupils, with the EU subsidy of 65 million EUR.

With the new and simpler rules of the scheme as well as new and more attractive products available, it is expected that in the future more schools will participate in the distribution of

dairy products allowing and encouraging children to replace low-quality food and drinks with convenient, high-quality dairy products.

The Most Deprived Programme

The Most Deprived Programme was set up in 1987. It was designed as a ‘win-win’ solution for the disposal of intervention stocks and feeding the most deprived persons.

In 2009 there were 500 millions € of overall budget (compared to 305 millions in 2008) distributed in 18 Member States involved. Over 18 millions beneficiaries (vs 14 millions in 2008) and 440 000 tons of products distributed (vs 300 000 t previously).

The Commission has proposed to modify the legal basis of the programme to adapt it to the changed circumstances (i.e. smaller availability of intervention stocks).

2.2. DISCUSSION

The Chair invited Member States representatives to discuss elements operating correctly as well as those which could be improved in these schemes.

Spain reported not sufficient amount of accompanying measures. Finland decided not to participate in the fruit scheme due to excessive administrative burden to be taken up in relation to their participation in the programme. Finland participates already in the milk scheme and is happy to see changes not linking subsidy with fat. According to the Finnish representative there is need for stronger health rules for eligible products.

France highlighted the problem of inequalities and asked if fruits provided by the scheme were not replacing fruit previously bought by parents.

3. SALT REDUCTION INITIATIVE

3.1. PRESENTATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Mrs Stephanie Bodenbach presented the main findings of this implementation report.

Most countries reported that food producers were willing to engage but cited potential barriers including: preference for a pan-European wide approach (Belgium), as long as it does not affect the final product (Cyprus), time needed to explore technical solutions (Denmark, Italy, Romania), provided they can promote their efforts in marketing (Finland), some sectors more on board than others (the Netherlands). A number of countries reported some reluctance by economic operators to engage themselves (Hungary and Latvia).

Less than half of the reporting countries reached concrete agreements with Food Industry. Out of those, only a few countries had specific quantifiable commitments to reductions in any product category.

Although many countries had no broad endorsement of framework by industry some progress was reported:

- media attention on activities promoted by the Ministry for the reduction of salt and prevention of hypertension (Italy),
- vision of the framework largely reflects the salt approach of national nutrition policy (the Netherlands),
- vision is agreed with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry but broad endorsement is a challenge for the implementation of the national salt action plan (Slovenia).

Most countries did not set any benchmarks.

There were variations in views regarding the approach to industry.

Direct agreements with industry sectors and with individual companies were among the most frequently chosen.

3.2. DISCUSSION

While already postponed from the last meeting due to the lack of contributions by Member States, the current version remain incomplete and the Chair asked to the HLG members to proceed with their contribution without further delay.

Representatives of several countries took the floor to give updates on implemented initiatives on salt reduction. In Spain industry is reluctant to lower salt content in products even if during negotiations they expressed support for actions. Finland stressed the importance of realistic benchmarks and incentives for industry. Finland is not having separate campaigns for salt reduction as this topic is part of a broader programme on education on health.

Germany has quite a comprehensive approach for nutrition and therefore decided not to have a separate strategy for salt reduction. Bread seems to be one of the most important sources of salt in diets of German citizens and therefore it was chosen as a target for salt reduction. Other countries not having separate campaigns on salt but comprehensive programmes on health and nutrition are Denmark and Sweden.

Many countries supported the idea of logos as incentive tools for industry. They have as well supported the idea to organise EU meetings with food producers (as the one organised previously with the bakery sector).

In Poland the average salt level is about 13g/d and differently to other countries it comes from salt added in the households.

The Chair concluded the discussion on salt reduction by stating that last contributions are expected in the coming two weeks and that the Commission will take the comments into account when designing the questionnaires for the next salt report due in 2012 as described in the Council Conclusions regarding salt.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLATFORM

Philippe Roux gave an overview of last developments at the last Platform meeting.

It was confirmed that the Platform Charter of 2005 and the Monitoring Framework of 2007 remain central reference documents. The members endorsed a paper on the priorities for the renewal of their commitments.

The Platform committed to boost activities that contribute to the objectives of the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues for the next 3 years.

In particular, the Platform agreed on the following priority areas and target groups for 2011 - 2013:

- vulnerable groups including children and adolescents and low socio-economic groups;
- improvements of already existing commitments in the area of advertising and marketing to children;
- improvements of already existing commitments in the area of reformulation;
- physical activity and sports;
- reaching out to schools with the aim of increasing physical activity and making the healthy option available.

In addition, the Platform approved consolidated working methods and minimum requirements for Platform commitments. These focused in particular on:

- reinforcement of the relation between the Platform and the High Level Group;
- opening to other EU policies;
- a more structured approach to debate on the commitments with a stronger role for the Monitoring contractor; a monitoring-in-meetings approach.

A third of the 146 active commitments will finish soon and 12 Platform members will need to submit at least one new commitment in 2011.

5. FOOD REFORMULATION

5.1. EU FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL INITIATIVES ON SELECTED NUTRIENTS - SUMMARY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE REPLIES

DG SANCO has received 25 replies to the questionnaire. In some countries the initiative is under preparation and discussion and still needs political endorsement. Other countries continue with their established approach. Few reported other national priorities due to

economic crisis. In general, national initiatives on other nutrients are part of broader programmes. Most countries have worked in this area already before the EU framework was approved.

The areas where Member States expressed their willingness to work were mostly saturated and trans-fat, energy intake, total fat and added sugars.

Five key elements attributed to the success of future actions for reformulation of other nutrients are:

- collecting data on food consumption and major contributing food categories,
- identifying major food categories to focus action on (priorities) and setting of benchmarks,
- actions to encourage industry/catering to reformulate food products/ work on portion sizes offered,
- actions to raise public awareness,
- monitoring & evaluation of actions and reformulation activities,

5.2. DISCUSSION

Spain stated that education is not enough. The issue of trans-fatty acids is mature enough and the evidence so strong that we should aim for regulation in that field.

The Belgian representative stressed that the message to the industry should be clear and strong.

France asked if it would be possible to organise Commission's support in situations where there is urgent need for assessment of scientific evidence. The Chair concluded that this should be organised on the national level.

In conclusion, the Chair proposed that the Commission services

- organise a technical workshop in order to discuss possible benchmarks for reformulation to have a base for agreement before the next plenary meeting
- prepare a summary paper describing the initiatives in the Member States.

5.3. THE PREPARATION OF FOOD AND NUTRITION ACTION PLAN AND FOCUS ON THE PLANNED REFORMULATION ACTIVITIES – NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM SLOVENIA- MS MOJCA GABRIJELČIČ BLENKUS

Mojca Gabrijelčič, National Institute of Public Health in Slovenia and HLG representative from Slovenia, presented the preparation of the Slovenian nutrition action plan for 2012-20 (FNAP) with special focus on the planned reformulation activities. General principles of food reformulation initiatives for Slovenia will be defined in the new FNAP 2012-20. The main

focus in 2011 will be in participative definition of goals and targets of FNAP 2011-20, including reformulation activities, too. A basic and realistic time frame for implementation will be discussed in this context together with all kinds of capacities necessary for successful implementation and enforcement.

The situation analysis with prioritization was partly performed, however, detailed description of the situation is still needed. Some sporadic initiatives of reformulation beside salt were observed in Slovenia.

Slovenian authorities are discussing reformulation aspects together with the Chamber of Commerce (food processing industry sector) being a legal representative of food processing industry in Slovenia with specific care taken for national producers, ensuring participatory involvement in the processes of the FNAP preparation, implementation and evaluation.

Currently, Slovenia is mainly introducing institutionalized activities to raise awareness about reformulation (educating children within regular school curricula) and supporting NGOs' activities (for instance Slovene Consumer Organization – they launched a web page “Do you know what do you eat?”). Comprehensive public awareness activities will be defined in the FNAP 2011-20 (including the definition of involved partners).

The inclusion of integral reformulation into the preparation process and in the FNAP itself will give expected broader endorsement, by ensuring participation of all stakeholders in the process, using health in all policies approach and focusing on social determinants of nutrition, physical activity and obesity.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Hungarian representative for the HLG presented an updated programme for the "Expert level conference on Member States Activities on nutrition, physical activity and smoking related health issues" jointly organised by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and European Commission in Budapest on 30-31 May 2011.

7. CONCLUSIONS:

1. Member States will submit their final comments on the salt reduction implementation report by the end of May. Member States that have not yet sent in their reports are asked to do so as well.
2. The next High Level Group meeting will take place in November and Member States are asked to send in ideas for this meeting with the Platform on the reformulation points.

3. The Commission will

- publish a report on salt reduction
- organise a technical workshop in order to discuss possible benchmarks for reformulation.
- prepare a summary paper describing the aims of the situation of the initiative in Member States.

The Chair thanked the European Health & Fitness Association for having organised and provided a trainer for short physical activity breaks for the meeting.