

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

15th NOVEMBER 2012 10.00-16.00

VENUE: CHARLEMAGNE BUILDING
[ROOM: JENKINS]

CHAIR: Despina Spanou

Final Minutes

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The Chair welcomed the participants underlining that the session was mainly dedicated to food reformulation and the external evaluation process of the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related health issues.

2. REFORMULATION FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL INITIATIVES ON SELECTED NUTRIENTS: IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

Ms Stephanie Bodenbach (European Commission) presented the preliminary findings of a survey carried out following the endorsement of the common approach to reduce saturated fat in the EU, in the Annex to the Framework on Selected Nutrients. 19 Member States had answered the questionnaire. The study addressing the existing or planned initiatives on saturated fat by the EU Member States allowed determining that:

- a majority of Member States have national recommendations on saturated fat and most of the reported initiatives were part of a broader national program;
- many national initiatives also involve work on total fat, fat quality and trans fat;
- the overall reduction benchmarks for saturated fat of 5% within 4 years, and an additional 5% until 2020, were seen by about two thirds of the responding countries as a reduction of the population intake levels of saturated fat while the other third views those levels as reduction benchmarks for product categories;
- reformulation by industry was considered as important as raising consumer awareness on saturated fat.

After the presentation the Chair opened the floor for comments and questions.

Finland commented on the fact that they are not promoting low-fat dairy products, but fat-free products. **Germany** informed participants that they promote low-fat dairy products, which have a 1.5 % fat level. The term 'low-fat' is defined for milk products at EU level and therefore a specific term should be used. **Sweden** commented that a definition for low-fat was needed.

The Chair concluded that progress has been made and that most Member States believe that further progress can be achieved through agreements with the industry based on specific targets. Reformulation remains a key priority for the Members of the High Level Group. The discussion demonstrated that certain issues still require clarification, such as the definition of "low fat" for dairy products.

The European Commission will take note of the results of the survey carried out with Member States. The European Commission will also continue to monitor Member States' actions so that it can report, in the course of the next year, where Member States stand in relation to common agreement in the annex to the framework on selected nutrients.

3. THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSIBILITY DEAL IN ENGLAND

Mr. Richard Cienciala, the High Level Group representative for the UK, presented the Public Health Responsibility Deal, established in March 2011. It aims to attract commitments from businesses and other organisations in the areas of alcohol, food, health at work and physical activity that partners agree to take. The alcohol and food pledges focus on actions that manufacturers, retailers, the out-of-home dining/catering sector and bars and pubs can deliver. The "health at work" and "physical activity" pledges are not sector specific and any organisation can sign up to these.

Finland enquired about the funding of the UK Deal and how the implementation of commitments will be evaluated.

Spain requested further information on the number of companies which have signed up to the Deal, since it is an opportunity to learn and perhaps to implement the initiative.

Denmark was impressed by UK's work, as collaboration with food industry can take time. In Denmark, there are partnerships on fruit and vegetables and on wholegrain, and they have started working with stakeholders on fast food and catering.

France shared its experience on collaborating with the food industry. Only 32 food businesses signed the agreement in France, because those were the only businesses passing the nutrition criteria. The Responsibility Deal should present results to the Platform where umbrella organisations for food operators are members. Finally, France touched upon the dilemma of beverage companies marketing soft drinks while simultaneously promoting physical activity (e.g. by participating in great sports events).

The Chair enquired about the public's reaction to the UK Responsibility Deal.

Mr Cienciala responded that business operators pay for their actions. The Department of Health has 2.5 people working in a secretariat and they try to push companies by positively encouraging them to get involved. For example, they have arranged meetings between the ministers and the business operators. There is already a list on the website of the 400 companies who have signed up, and NGOs as well as other businesses follow this development closely. The majority of the main chains in the UK participate in the Deal.

Mr Cienciala further informed that there has been a lot of debate in the UK on this initiative, primarily in the media. The Responsibility Deal is not designed as a public facing instrument,

but rather focuses on business operators. Evaluators have started to look at evaluation models for such a Public Private Partnership and outputs could be analysed; for example, how many companies are doing each of the calorie reduction initiatives. However, the difficult element is to assess the impact on people's behaviour/ habits. Mr Cienciala will send guidance papers to Denmark, which covers the rules for participation in the Deal.

The Chair concluded by welcoming an update from the UK when further results are available.

4. EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR EUROPE ON NUTRITION, OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY-RELATED HEALTH ISSUES

Mr Bradford Rohmer from The Evaluation Team presented an update on the external evaluation of the Strategy. At this stage the evaluators only have preliminary findings based on the interviews and desk research on the work of the High Level Group and the stakeholders in the Platform. These first findings show that the High Level Group members consider their group to be a unique forum for knowledge exchange and peer learning, as well as a useful network for generating awareness about nutrition, obesity and physical activity developments in other Member States. The members also appreciate the regular updates on the EU policies that can contribute to reducing overweight and obesity. The EU Platform is considered by its members as a forum of dialogue. A gradual improvement of the relevance of the commitments against the Platform objectives is acknowledged; the coverage of the commitments for action in the EU has also improved. However, the assessment of the impact of these commitments remains challenging.

There were no comments or questions following this presentation.

The Chair referred to the timetable for the evaluation and outlined that the final report is expected in March/April 2013. The European Commission hopes to present the evaluation report at a joint Platform/High Level Group meeting in June 2013.

5. HEALTHY EATING POLICIES, WHAT WORKS? EVIDENCE FROM THE EATWELL PROJECT

Professor Mario Mazzocchi presented the EATWELL project, co-financed by the 7th Framework Programme for Research and carried out by the Eatwell Research Consortium (University of Reading, University of London (SOAS), Aarhus Universitet, Universiteit Gent, Alma Mater Studiorum-Universita Di Bologna, Istituto Nazionale di Ricerca per gli Alimenti e la Nutrizione (INRAN), Rome, Jagiellonian University Medical College, European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA), European Food Information Council (EUFIC) and Kraft Foods R&D) in 5 EU Member States.

The project, running from 2009-2013, provides guidelines for policy interventions encouraging healthy eating across Europe on the basis of the review of existing interventions in several Member States and their evaluations. As part of the analysis, the project has selected certain case studies for evaluation: 5-a-day (UK), where they found that the intake of fruit and vegetables was raised by 0.3 portions; Salt Campaign (UK), where a 10% reduction was found in salt intake; and Reformulation (international), which was found to be very effective for fats and trans fats.

The project outlined the following findings and recommendations for policies supporting informed choice:

- in general, information measures have a small but positive effect on healthy eating and, because they are relatively cheap, they are generally cost-effective. They are also well regarded by the public and stakeholders;
- continued use of public information campaigns, with the proviso that investment be long term in order to sustain effects on behaviour;
- nutrition education should be a compulsory component of school curricula in all EU countries and efforts should be made to improve the attractiveness of its provision and ensure messages are enhanced with information on healthy lifestyles and the provision of attractive and healthy food in school canteens;
- since nutrition label use is limited by motivation and attention, and more consumers look front of-pack, the information should be based on insights from consumer research and eye-tracking technology. Effectiveness of colour-coding or a health logo should be further evaluated.

The detailed recommendations from the project are compiled in the report “Effectiveness of Policy Interventions to Promote Healthy Eating and Recommendations for Future Action” (www.eatwellproject.eu), which was distributed to the members of the High Level Group during the meeting.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions by outlining that the evaluation of the Strategy will provide more answers as to which nutrition policies work, which could also be useful for the Eatwell project.

Finland wanted to know which method was used for the project.

Prof Mazzocchi remarked that even though the project report from Eatwell is final and published, the project will be running until March 2013. He stated that the next 6 months will deal with dissemination of activities and a survey on public acceptance. These findings, however, will not affect the existing results. OECD reports and relevant literature were used for the project and a cost-effectiveness analysis on existing literature was performed.

The Chair concluded that the findings from the Eatwell project will be useful for the Strategy evaluation.

6. HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY PLANET

Mr Tony Long, Director of the World Wide Fund for Nature, European Policy Office, presented the LiveWell for Life project (budget: 2 million euro), co-financed by the EU’s LIFE Programme for the Environment. The project will develop potential win-win policy scenarios demonstrating that what is good for the health of our planet is good for our health, too.

Food production and consumption is currently 23% of the global ecological footprint. To grow enough food, people have to change diets, in particular in relation to consumption of meat and dairy. Based on the concept of the ‘Eatwell Plate’ – a visual communications tool created by the UK Food Standards Agency to promote nutritionally healthy diets – the LiveWell Plate was developed to encourage people to eat more healthily and reduce their

carbon footprint. The LiveWell Plate should contribute to a 25% reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases, while at the same time not costing significantly more than the current diet, and not differing too much from people's usual diet. The project is now testing and evaluating 'LiveWell plates' in three pilot countries: France, Spain and Sweden. Italy might be a fourth pilot country because of their great interest in food. The outcomes will be available by 2014.

There were no comments or questions following this presentation but the Chair pointed out that as sustainability is rising on the public agenda, it would be interesting to learn about the results of this project.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sweden expressed concern with regards to specific health claims which were recently discussed at a meeting in the Commission Expert Group on Nutrition and Health Claims. These health claims were related to carbohydrates that induce low/reduced glycaemic responses and carbohydrates with a low glycaemic index. Sweden wanted to inform participants and the European Commission. In the expert group, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Greece stated that they were against these claims since the wording may encourage people to eat more sugar.

The Chair took note of the concern and will inform relevant European Commission colleagues.

Norway informed participants about the recently proposed Regulation to restrict marketing of food and beverages with a high content of energy, fat, saturated fat, sugars and/or salt to children. Marketing towards children takes place, and the existing guidelines in Norway do not protect children sufficiently, which is reason for proposing a Regulation. The Norwegian Authorities have already consulted stakeholders on the proposal as it was published online on 7 June 2012, with a deadline for submitting responses of 21 September.

Most of the NGOs are in favour of the Regulation, but the food industry and marketing sector are opposing it. At this stage, the Ministry of Health in Norway is looking at the comments it has received, but it is difficult to say whether the government will go through with the Regulation. Norway can inform the participants about the progress during the next meeting in the High Level Group.

The Chair confirmed that there were no comments on the minutes of the meeting of 14 June 2012 and therefore the minutes were adopted.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CHAIR

The Chair presented the EC/OECD Health at a Glance Report 2012 published on 16 November 2012. The Chair also highlighted that, according to statistics from the report, obesity is unfortunately increasing in adults and in children, which makes the work of the High Level Group all the more relevant.

The Chair concluded that:

- the European Commission will continue to monitor national initiatives on saturated fat reduction on the basis of Annex 1 of the EU Framework for National Initiatives on selected Nutrients as confirmed at the High Level Group meeting on 14 June 2012;
- the European Commission will inform the Council of the implementation of the EU Salt reduction Framework from 2008 to 2012 in December 2012;
- the UK Responsibility Deal approach is an example of a national approach reflecting the spirit of the EU Strategy and contributing to its outcomes at national level.
- the members of the High Level Group are encouraged to actively and substantially participate in the external evaluation of the Strategy in order to provide meaningful guidance on the implementation of the EU Strategy on Nutrition, as well as guidance for future actions.
- taking into account the interest from several delegations, an in-depth discussion on evaluation techniques will be held in June 2013, on the occasion of the joint meeting with the Platform on the evaluation of the Strategy.

The next meeting of the High Level Group is scheduled to take place on 7 February 2013.