



Roadmap for Action on Food Product Improvement



2016

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Food Product Improvement

We, the supporters of this Roadmap for Action on food product improvement, consider:

Urgency

- That the prevalence of overweight, obesity and other diet-related non-communicable diseases in the European population is too high and is still rising. This has a negative impact on life expectancy in the European Union (EU). It results in a reduced quality of life for many people and affects society, for example through threatening the availability of a healthy and sustainable work force and high health care costs. Thus, also imposing an economic burden on the EU.

Particularly the rise of overweight and obesity among children is a serious concern that asks for strong concerted action. The urgency for action in this field has been addressed previously in various documents both at EU and World Health Organisation (WHO) level¹.

- That nutrition plays an important role in this context, alongside other lifestyle-related aspects. To make the healthy choice the easy choice, a holistic approach is needed; products and physical and social environments that support and encourage healthy patterns of consumption, and nutrition information and education are the key to policies and actions at national and local level.
- That concerted action contributes to achieving population intake levels and dietary patterns in line with national, regional, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the WHO recommendations. A target has already been set at WHO level for a 30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt, with the aim of achieving a consumption of less than 5 grams of salt per day by 2025. Reduction of salt, saturated fats and added sugars (calories) in food products, besides other policies and actions, will make it easier to eat according to nutritional guidelines for these nutrients.

¹ Non exhaustive list: EU strategy on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related Health Issues 2007, WHO European Food and Nutrition Action Plan 2015–2020, Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Non-communicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020, EU action plan on childhood obesity for the period 2014 – 2020)

- That the diet of many Europeans contains too much salt, saturated fats and sugars (calories), mostly consumed by processed foods, whilst at the same time most people for example do not consume enough fruits and vegetables and wholegrain products.
- That to improve people's diet, it is important to make the healthy choice the easy choice. Food product improvement is an important means to contribute to this.
- That national governments have the responsibility to set public health objectives and food business operators throughout the supply chain including industry, retail, catering, bars, restaurants etcetera have a shared responsibility to improve their food products to contribute to improving people's diets.

Cross-border issue

- That foods and drinks² are extensively traded across borders within the EU Single Market. Therefore, food product improvement specifically asks for cross-border cooperation. Such cooperation could result in a better functioning of the EU internal market and could also encourage innovation by food business operators.
- That there are cultural differences in taste and eating behaviour, which partly determine the approach, the pace of reduction of salt, saturated fat and added sugars, and the final results. Every approach should respect cultural differences in diets.

State of play

- That the point of departure varies between Member States. Some already have a history in product improvement. Among their activities are the setting of compositional criteria for products, either as a maximum level for separate product groups, criteria for school meals or other public procurement of food, criteria related to labelling or criteria related to marketing of food products to children. In some Member States, there is already national regulation with certain compulsory compositional criteria.
- That also several food business operators have taken up the challenge and have shown responsibility by improving the composition of their products.

² Where food or foods is mentioned throughout the document, both foods and drinks are meant.

- That at EU-level food product improvement is addressed in both the High Level Group on nutrition and physical activity (HLG) and the EU platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (EU Platform).
- That the European Commission (EC) has published frameworks for national initiatives on salt and on selected nutrients with annexes on saturated fats and added sugars. In this way political guidance for action is provided. Drafts of these documents were discussed and national experiences are exchanged at the HLG, where Member States are represented.
- That the EU platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health is a forum for European-level organisations willing to commit to tackling current trends in diet and physical activity, alongside the HLG. Organisations from different parts of society, ranging from the food industry associations to consumer and health protection nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), commit to specific actions.
- That concerted actions in public private cooperation in the area of food reformulation policies are needed to achieve sustainable results for the longer term. Close cooperation between HLG and the EU Platform is desirable and necessary for this. A start has been made at the working group meeting last January 18 on the implementation of the Annex on Added Sugars.
- That NGOs at national and EU level have put the importance of food composition on the agenda and contribute to raising awareness among consumers.

Experiences, challenges and innovation

- That results have shown that it is possible to achieve considerable progress in reducing the levels of salt, saturated fats and added sugars (calories) in products or the portion size of products. This offers possibilities to learn from, encourage and challenge each other. To reach the majority of the population, and especially people with a lower socio-economic status, more action is needed on mainstream products throughout the supply chain and across the shelves in relevant product groups.
- That food product improvement can contribute to the goal to decrease health inequalities.
- That it should be taken into account that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack the necessary resources or skills to work on food product improvement. Raising awareness among, support of and attention for SMEs by sharing knowledge and best-practices is important in view of their market share.
- That improving composition of food products is not only an important means to make the healthy choice the easy choice for the consumer. It also opens up great possibilities for healthy innovation and business opportunities.
- That other considerations like for example technological possibilities, food safety and sustainability goals can influence the possible results of food product improvement.

Consumers

- That gradual reduction of salt, saturated fats and added sugars in foods is needed to maintain consumer acceptance of improved products.
- That communication towards the consumer about improved products is important yet can be challenging.
- That raising purchasers and manufacturers awareness on healthy food composition can contribute to product and meal improvement throughout the food chain and can promote healthier food choices by consumers.
- That the nutrient declaration on the label provides information for consumers to help them make a healthier choice. EU legislation on food labelling is in place in order to regulate the information on food labels.
- That healthy choice logos, such as for example Keyhole, Better Choice -Heart symbol- and Choices, have proven to stimulate product improvement.

Research, data and monitoring

- That research provides the necessary information for a solid approach of product improvement. In general, the information for the first important steps of reduction is available. This information can be distributed and exploited better.
- That research in preparation for the more challenging next steps can be performed in cooperation through EU programmes.
- That data on current consumption and product composition strengthen performed activities by providing data to target actions on the most relevant product groups. However these data are not yet readily available at EU level.
- That regular independent monitoring of product composition is essential to gain insight into the results of undertaken actions.
- That transparency and accessibility of data facilitates good practice and serves as inspiration to build on results and share experiences and best practices.

Approach and actions

A shared long-term agenda is needed to reduce the levels of salt, saturated fats and added sugars (calories) in foods throughout the EU. This Roadmap aims to accelerate concerted action from national governments, food business operators, the European Commission, WHO and NGOs. Multi stakeholder cooperation, underpinned by sound research, data and independent monitoring and by exchanging best practices and facilitating industry with development and implementation of knowledge form the key to reaching results.

The supporters of this Roadmap endorse the urgency to develop more concerted action to move step by step towards a healthier product offer by lowering levels of salt, saturated fats and added sugars (calories), and do so according to the following lines:

I. Work in close multi stakeholder collaboration at EU level on food product improvement:

- a. Improved coordination and cooperation between the existing High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity (+ Expert Group on Reformulation) and EU Platform on Nutrition and Physical Activity, for more focused discussions and public private exchange of information on the matter of food product improvement.
- b. Establishing working groups with (a subgroup of) experts from Member States and stakeholders from the EU Platform:
 - To define principles for working in Public-Private Cooperation.
 - To discuss possibilities and sharing best practices for improving product composition by product group.
 - To share best practices for setting criteria (either for catering, public procurement of food, maximum levels in food products, logos, marketing targeting children).
 - Progress made by the working groups will be published.

II. Improve scientific basis, monitoring and data collection and sharing at EU level³ on (improved) products, consumption, methods.

- a. Establish an independent scientific check for the monitoring of EU Platform commitments. Commitments should be measurable, comparable and monitored in a sound and transparent way.
- b. Increase coordination and alignment of research activities and open research data to underpin the development of healthy product through the Joint Programming Initiative: Healthy Diet for a Healthy Life³.
- c. Explore the set up of a recognised EU mechanism to aim for harmonisation of data collection and analytical methods. Building on experience and activities of WHO, EFSA, the JRC and EU projects like JANPA, EU MENU, EFCOVAL, EUROFIR, EURODISH and DEDIPAC.
- d. Explore the possibilities for including nutrition and health activities, specifically related to food product improvement, of companies into 'regular' worldwide auditing initiatives around Corporate Social Responsibility.

III. Exchange best practices & facilitate implementation by companies

- a. Make use of the online multi-stakeholder EU health policy forum, with special pages on food product improvement to:
 - Share experiences, challenges and knowledge (explore possible link with existing databases like FoodDrinkEurope's).
 - Showcase results.
 - Identify obstacles in the EU internal market for food business operators and make recommendations for possible solutions to these obstacles.
 - Update all stakeholders about the progress of separate working groups.
- b. Initiate and support involvement of national governments and EC Directorate Generals responsible for health, agriculture, innovation, research and internal market to:
 - Enlarge and optimize possibilities for technology and research projects both with respect to development and implementation of knowledge.
 - Raise awareness and facilitate involvement of SMEs.

These agreements and actions should contribute to a healthier choice being more easily available in the EU by 31 December 2020. Regular (joint) meetings of the HLG and EU platform can be used to update all stakeholders on the actions above.

All possible new activities will be closely coordinated with existing groups and actions, like the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity (JANPA, coordinated by France, mainly work package 5) and the WHO European Salt Action Network (ESAN, coordinated by Switzerland).

To work efficiently, electronic working groups with a limited number of participants or exchange of information by means of a web-based forum is preferred, bearing in mind the need for regular updates to all relevant stakeholders.

³ **NB:** monitoring of progress to be outlined with the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity (JANPA) coordinated by France and be seen in the light of the work of ongoing activities of WHO Euro, EC and JRC)

This Roadmap for action on food product improvement
is endorsed by:

The EU Member States and EFTA countries:

Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
Germany
Hungary
Ireland
Latvia
Lithuania
Malta
Netherlands
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden

Norway
Switzerland

The food business operators:

EuroCommerce
FoodDrinkEurope
FoodServiceEurope
Serving Europe

The non governmental organisations:

European Chronic Disease Alliance
European Healthy Lifestyle Alliance
European Heart Network
European Kidney Health Alliance

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