



UEAPME Position Paper

3 October 2006

European Platform for Action on
Diet, Physical Activity and Health

1 Food is both a necessity and a pleasure. Eating is to do with the quality of life as well as an unavoidable requirement. Any discussion on diet must take both these functions into account.

2 Persons who take an unhealthy diet, are over-weight or who do not take enough exercise are at risk of conditions that may cause absence from work and even premature death. UEAPME and its member associations, representing the vast majority of all producers and distributors of foodstuff in the EU, are fully aware of this tendency.

3 The European Commission is therefore seeking ideas for measures to prevent citizens from becoming over-weight and even obese. The suggestions are to promote a healthy diet coupled with more exercise. It is the view of UEAPME and its members that the promotion is best effected not by regulation but by education. UEAPME would oppose the possibility of regulation as this could be costly for small business and may not achieve its objectives. The contribution by small businesses throughout the EU can be significant in the fields of diet and health. We are not in a position to affect exercise.

4 Small food businesses are well placed to supply wholesome food. That is the strength and, in many cases, their commercial edge. This applies not only to producers but also to retailers and small caterers who have the time and knowledge to talk to customers. The supermarket shoppers are at the mercy of the label as they may have no one to talk to.

5 Consumer studies have shown that many customers do not read labels, and even if they did they would not understand the mass on information now demanded. It is also alleged that the people most predisposed to obesity are the very ones least likely to read labels

whether colour coded or as plain numeric values. This is the result of a lack of education that should have started at early schooling stages.

6 UEAPME sees the optimum solution being public education. Customers will only ask for healthier options if it is known what they are, they are available and they are reasonably priced. We see education by the authorities in the member states as being the most effective way to achieve the objectives. We note also that the objectives in terms of guideline daily amounts (GDAs) may vary from State to State because of climate or other conditions.

7 The European Commission should take action to promote healthy sources of food by making it easier to sell fresh produce. Local markets and local co-operatives are useful ways in which this objective could be achieved. Therefore the existing regulations should be interpreted to favour these activities and not burden them with bureaucratic duties. There are many opportunities for small derogations that would in no way jeopardise food safety but would encourage and assist small businesses to supply the ingredients for a balanced and enticing diet. Appropriate training for food SMEs in nutrition information should be given by support organisations.

8 UEAPME would be most reluctant to see regulation as an answer to the problem. We do not see that as being effective. Nor do we see financial enhancement as a solution, such as a tax on "unhealthy" foods. These foods are often useful in a balanced diet. Therefore we do not see particular foods as always being either good or bad. UEAPME sees encouragement and the co-operation with and of small business as the best way forward.

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