



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Health Claims: much remains to be done after Parliament’s Committee vote

Brussels, 28 March 2006. The Working Group on Foodstuffs of UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation, mildly welcomed the results of the second reading vote on the Regulation on Health Claims by the European Parliament’s Environment and Public Health Committee. By excluding health claims on unpacked food from the scope of the Directive, the Parliament paved the way to protect Europe’s SMEs from overregulation, although much remains to be done.

“We welcome the vote by the Parliament’s Committee and its efforts to improve an unworkable proposal from the Commission”, said **Ludger Fischer**, UEAPME Adviser on Food issues and Co-ordinator of the UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs. “However, we hope that the Parliament’s Plenary will further improve the text to achieve workable procedures for Europe’s SMEs.”

The Environment Committee amended the original proposal to clarify that unpacked food is to be excluded from the scope of the Regulation. This would ease the burden on entrepreneurs using health claims to inform customers on specific foodstuff. MEPs stressed that “particular attention shall be given to SMEs”. The Working Group also welcomed the new wording of the authorisation procedures, which would be replaced by a so-called “community registration system” meant to shorten the process.

On the other hand, nutrient profiles are still a condition for making health claims, and some of the amendments even complicated this requirement further. Claims disseminating scientific knowledge will be subject to additional authorisation: the Working Group believes this is overly complicated and will lead to double work. The wording on nutrient profiles for alcoholic beverages was also unnecessarily complicated by the approved amendments.

“SMEs will be seriously disadvantaged if these issues are not properly assessed by the Parliament in Plenary vote”, continued Mr Fischer. “Their impact on SMEs is much broader than estimated.” The Regulation will affect food producers in Europe by requiring them to provide nutrient profiles. It will also create a distinction between “good” and “bad” food, which is totally unnecessary and unacceptable.

“We hope that the Parliament will confirm in Plenary the good work made by the members of the Environment and Public Health Committee on unpacked food and on the new community registration system, and take it to the next level on nutrient profiles, to the advantage of Europe’s SMEs and consumers alike”, concluded Mr Fischer.

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EDITORS’ NOTE: UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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