

# TACD

TRANS ATLANTIC DIALOGUE TRANSATLANTIQUE  
CONSUMER DIALOGUE DES CONSOMMATEURS

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## Resolution on Nutrition, Obesity and Diet-Related Disease

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### **Introduction**

Obesity and diet-related disease are major causes of death across the European Union (EU) and United States (U.S.). In several countries in the EU over one in five adults are now obese. This includes Hungary, England, Germany, Cyprus, Malta, Greece, the Czech Republic and some parts of Portugal<sup>1</sup>. In the U.S. over one in four adults are obese. Of particular concern is the rising incidence of overweight and obesity in children and associated health problems, including type II diabetes.

### **Overall recommended approach to diet-related disease**

TACD urges the EU and U.S. to address the growing incidence of diet-related disease through a coordinated set of public policy mechanisms. Such efforts should be a priority given the growing burden to society posed by diet-related disease. As recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health<sup>2</sup>, it is necessary to promote and protect health by guiding the development of an enabling environment that supports healthy choices. This should include introducing restrictions on food marketing, particularly to children, encouraging reformulation of products to lower the use of unhealthy fats, salt and added sugars, clearer labelling, and improvements in the school food environment.

As one element of a comprehensive public health campaign, the governments of the EU and U.S. should publicly fund social marketing campaigns to promote healthier eating. It is also important that efforts to tackle obesity and diet-related disease are not undermined by other government policies, such as agricultural promotional programs. A co-ordinated, multi-faceted approach is essential.

TACD has hosted two transatlantic conferences - Generation Excess I and II (jointly hosted with BEUC, the European Consumer Organisation) - on this issue in order to help gain a better understanding of the evidence for action and to share best practice. TACD believes that there are specific actions that can be taken by the governments of the EU and U.S. that will help reduce the incidence of obesity and diet-related disease.

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<sup>1</sup> International Obesity Task Force (IOTF)

<sup>2</sup> Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, World Health Organisation, 2004

## **Specific Recommendations**

### **Marketing of foods to children**

Food industry marketing expenditures dwarf expenditures for healthy eating messages<sup>3</sup>. A range of marketing tactics are used to target children with foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt and which therefore contradict the advice of experts to eat healthily. There is clear evidence that advertising and promotion influences children's food preferences and choices<sup>4</sup> – and therefore restrictions are needed that tackle all forms of marketing used to promote foods high in fat, sugar and / or salt to children. In addition to traditional TV advertising<sup>5</sup>, on-pack promotions, new technologies utilizing the internet, cell phones, and other media raise additional concerns.

These emerging and worrying trends in marketing undermine positive efforts and initiatives to promote healthier eating. For example, TACD is concerned about the emergence of new “stealth”, “guerrilla” and “viral” marketing techniques, such as the use of text messages and computer games targeted children which encourage them to consume foods of low nutritional value. TACD also recognises the problem of “pester power”<sup>6</sup> in which marketers urge children to pressure their parents to purchase such foods<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, TACD is concerned about the ways that foods of low nutritional value are promoted to children within schools.

- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to strengthen regulations restricting the marketing of foods of low nutritional value (i.e. foods high in fat, sugar and / or salt) to ensure that children are not targeted by producers of such products. Such regulations must address all forms of marketing.
- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to take measures to stop the marketing of beverages of low or no nutritional value on school premises.
- Within the EU, the revision of the Television without Frontiers Directive provides an opportunity to introduce restrictions for TV advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and / or salt across Europe<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See a 2005 report on advertising expenditures in the U.S. at [www.consumersunion.org/pdf/OutofBalance.pdf](http://www.consumersunion.org/pdf/OutofBalance.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Review of the research on the effects of food promotion to children. Final report – prepared for the Food Standards Agency, Gerard Hastings et al, 22 Sept. 2003; 2005 U.S. Institute of Medicine Report: McGinnis, J. M., Gootman, J.A. and Kraak, V.A., eds. (2005). *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* Committee on Food Marketing and the Diets of Children and Youth, Institute of Medicine: The National Academies Press, released 6 December 2005, [www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/21939/31330.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/21939/31330.aspx);

<sup>5</sup> In its September 2005 survey on TV advertising of food products, the Dutch consumer organisation - Consumentenbond - found that about 80% of such advertising concerned about snacks, soft drinks and confectionery - foods of low or no nutritional value.

<sup>6</sup> Pester Power – the ability of children to nag their parents into purchasing items they would otherwise not buy or performing actions they would otherwise not do.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of consumer organization research into this issue can be found here: [www.which.net/campaigns/food/kidsfood/060131childcatchers\\_rep.pdf](http://www.which.net/campaigns/food/kidsfood/060131childcatchers_rep.pdf), [http://cspinet.com/new/pdf/pages\\_from\\_pestering\\_parents\\_final\\_pt\\_1.pdf](http://cspinet.com/new/pdf/pages_from_pestering_parents_final_pt_1.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See TACD resolution on food advertising and marketing to children (Food-23-04, [www.tacd.org/docs/?id=220](http://www.tacd.org/docs/?id=220))

- In the U.S., Congress should rescind limits on the authority of the Federal Trade Commission to regulate in this area and mandate regulatory programs consistent with the First Amendment of the Constitution.
- As part of responsible corporate behaviour, food companies associated with foods high in fat, sugar and / or salt, that sponsor children's sporting events or equipment and activities in schools, should do so without making use of their brand.

### **Healthier products**

Many manufacturers have produced healthier versions of their products or developed nutritionally-enhanced products in response to consumers' growing interest in health. However, TACD believes that there would be a greater beneficial impact on public health if manufacturers focused on improving the quality of their standard products.

- TACD calls for the governments of the EU and U.S. to work with manufacturers and retailers to set binding targets for reducing fat (including saturates and trans fats), added sugars and salt in their products. Governments should ask caterers to do the same for their standardized products, and review the appropriateness of portion sizes.

### **Clearer and honest labelling**

TACD believes that it is essential that consumers have access to full nutrition information so that they can make healthy choices and put government advice into practice<sup>9</sup>. It is essential that the health claims that they carry be approved before they are made<sup>10</sup>. Nutrition claims (e.g. 'low fat') also need to be clearly defined and regulated so that they do not appear on foods that are high in added sugars or calories. Restrictions are also needed to ensure that foods that are high in fat, sugar and / or salt cannot carry health or nutrition claims.

- TACD urges the EU to make the provision of full nutrition information on the back of pack a mandatory requirement. Such information should be based on standardized serving sizes, include a daily reference amount for each nutrient, and be displayed in an easy-to-read format based on consumer testing.
- In the U.S. current requirements for mandatory nutrition labelling should be updated to emphasize calorie content, set daily reference levels for trans fatty acids and added sugars.
- TACD calls for the governments of the EU and U.S. to also develop simplified front-of-pack labelling schemes to be used consistently by the food industry which help consumers to easily identify which foods are high, medium or low in unhealthy fats, added sugars or salt.

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<sup>9</sup> See BEUC position paper on Simplified Labelling and BEUC publication "Are health claims good for you? Not always" at [www.beuc.org](http://www.beuc.org); and the TACD resolution on nutrition labeling (Food-08-99, [www.tacd.org/docs/?id=8](http://www.tacd.org/docs/?id=8))

<sup>10</sup> See TACD resolution on health-related claims (Food-12-00, [www.tacd.org/docs/?id=20](http://www.tacd.org/docs/?id=20)) and on misleading food labeling (Food-14-00, [www.tacd.org/docs/?id=13](http://www.tacd.org/docs/?id=13))

### **School foods**

TACD believes that the governments of the EU and U.S. should take concrete steps to ensure a healthy eating environment in schools.

- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to prohibit the sale of soft drinks and snack foods of low nutritional value on school premises.
- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to introduce strict standards for school meals that help to ensure that they meet or exceed dietary guidelines for children.
- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to provide adequate funding for nutrition education and physical activity programs.
- TACD urges the governments of the EU and the U.S. to establish programs providing for free fruits and vegetables to school children.
- TACD urges the governments of the EU and U.S. to adequately fund school meals and meal preparation sites, and to prevent the sale of "competitive foods" on school premises.

### **Corporate behaviour and best practices**

TACD believes that multinational food companies that make improvements to their products - such as adding nutritional labelling or reducing unhealthy ingredients like cholesterol-raising trans fats - should do so everywhere they operate. In practice, most companies typically respond to national or regional pressures and make positive changes only in countries where they feel pressured to do so, but fail to do so on a transatlantic basis.

- TACD calls on the governments of the EU and U.S. to monitor such corporate behaviour, and encourage corporate policies to be based on best practices throughout the EU and U.S.
- TACD encourages the governments of the EU and U.S. to share best practices by considering the positive effects of actions already taken at various levels.
- TACD calls for multinational companies to introduce positive changes in a consistent manner throughout the EU and U.S., so that consumers throughout the transatlantic marketplace can benefit equally from changes in product reformulation, portion sizes, and marketing practices.
- TACD calls on the food industry to voluntarily take a more responsible approach, but believes that concrete and consistent action to address these problems generally requires legislative solutions.

### **Economic incentives and disincentives to promote healthier eating**

- TACD encourages the governments of the EU and U.S. to explore ways in which subsidies for fruits and vegetables, and existing sales taxes on food, could be sensibly reallocated to promote healthy eating.