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PRESS RELEASE

HEALTH AND NUTRITION CLAIMS ON FOOD: EU HEALTH MINISTERS SUPPORT NUTRIENT PROFILES FOR FOODS

Brussels, 9 December 2005 - Today a coalition of consumer and health groups - EURO COOP, European Heart Network, European Public Health Alliance, the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union and Eurocare - welcomed the approval by the 25 EU Health Ministries of a promising text for the Commission's proposal on nutrition and health claims.

In tune with the Commission's view on the dossier, the text adopted today by the ministerial representatives of the EU Member States looks promising from a consumer protection and public health perspective.

Health Ministries endorsed unanimously the principle establishing nutrient profiles for foods, which work as a pre-condition for food manufacturers to make a health or a nutrition claim related to their products. In other terms, only foods that have a desirable nutrient profile will be allowed to bear such claims. This should in principle prevent unscrupulous food operators from using health and nutrition claims in ways that are confusing to consumers. This occurs, for instance, in the case of a snack producer over-emphasizing the positive nutritional characteristics of his products while omitting those that may be deleterious for health.

A second positive outcome of the today's Council decision is the acceptance of a prior authorization system for health claims. An authorization system implies that foods bearing a health claim can be placed on the market only after it has been proved that the claim is scientifically substantiated. This will avoid consumers being exposed to unsubstantiated claims on health properties of the food products they buy and will result in a strengthened consumer and health protection across the EU.

With regard to the Council's decision, a spokesperson from the consumer and health coalition said: "The fact that all the Member States within the Council approve the Commission's proposal is a reassuring signal for European citizens. Now that the proposal is about to enter a second reading, we call upon the European Parliament to be as 'consumer- friendly' as the other EU institutions have showed to be".

Note to editors

The Commission's proposal on nutrition and health claims was published in 2003 and since then it has turned out to be a politically sensitive dossier. This year, in spring, the European Parliament by a slight majority of its members had managed to weaken the Commission's text in terms of consumer and health protection by deleting the article establishing nutrient profiles and making the use of health claims subject only to a mere notification procedure.

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