

Health and nutrition claims on food: Parliament deletes the Commission's safeguards!

European Community of Consumer Cooperatives

Rue Archimède, 17
B-1000 Brussels- Belgium
Tel. + 32 2 285.00.70
Fax. + 32 2 231.07.57
E-mail : info@eurocoop.coop
Web : <http://www.eurocoop.coop>



The European Heart Network (EHN)

Rue Montoyer, 31
B-1000 Brussels- Belgium
Tel. + 32 2 512 9174
Fax. + 32 2 503 3525
E-mail : ehn@skynet.be
Web : <http://www.ehnheart.org>



Alcohol related harm in Europe

Rue des Confédérés, 96-98
B-1000 Brussels- Belgium
Tel. + 32 2 736 05 72
Fax. + 32 2 736 73 51
E-mail : f.bertelettikemp@ias.org.uk
Web : <http://www.eurocare.org>



The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

Rue d'Arlon, 39-41
B-1000 Brussels - Belgium
Tel. + 32 2 230 30 56
Fax. + 32 2 233 38 80
E-mail : epha@epha.org
Web : <http://www.epha.org>



Pharmaceutical Group of the EU

Rue de Luxembourg 19 - 21
B-1000 Brussels - Belgium
Tel. + 32 2 238 08 18
Fax. + 32 2 238 08 19
E-mail : pharmacy@pgeu.org
Web : <http://www.pgeu.org>

In a controversial move, MEPs have rejected compromise amendments that would have re-introduced a requirement for nutrient profiles (article 4) for any health and nutrition marketing claims for food products. Voting yesterday in the Brussels plenary session confirmed the position taken by its Environment, Food Safety and Public Health Committee on 21 April 2005 to delete key parts of the Commission's draft 'Regulation on nutrition and health claims made on foods'.

'Disappointingly, MEPs failed to prioritise health and consumer protection and instead made it easier for the food industry to exploit the growing public concern about nutrition to market their products', said Tamsin Rose from the European Public Health Alliance backed by EURO COOP, the European Heart Network, Eurocare and the Pharmaceutical Group of the EU.

The Commission's draft Regulation recognised that health and nutrition claims on food products are powerful marketing tools, which when used inappropriately can be misleading for the consumer. The Commission proposed that only food products that met minimum nutritional criteria known as nutrient profiles could be promoted using health and nutrition claims, which would then be subject to prior approval by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) who would evaluate the claims based on scientific evidence. This would have given a clear signal to the consumer that such food items would contribute towards a healthy diet and a well defined standard for the food industry to reach in order to be able to promote a product on the grounds of health and nutrition.

Currently there are no controls at EU level on such claims and limited and fragmented regulation at national level. This has led to blatant abuse such as children's sweets being advertised as "low in fat" despite being almost entirely made of refined sugar or breakfast cereals being promoted as "rich in vitamins" when they contain only tiny amounts of vitamins and unhealthily high levels of sugar. In addition, Europe's consumption of alcohol is already high and causing considerable health damage. Therefore no health or nutrition claims that might encourage consumption should be allowed on alcohol products. Across the globe, the alarming trends of poor nutrition and obesity have led to tighter controls on how food is labelled and marketed. In response, the U.S, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have all established "nutrient profiles" as a pre-condition for food products to be marketed using health or nutritional claims.

In a retrograde step, MEPs removed the requirements for food product bearing claims to meet a nutrient profile and for a system prior authorisation of a health and nutrition claim by EFSA. Instead, MEPs opted for the weaker system of notification only. This puts the burden on EFSA and consumer organisations to challenge the use of inaccurate or inappropriate health and nutritional claims, and provides no guarantee for consumers that products purchased bearing health or nutritional claims are indeed as healthy or nutritious as they claim to be.

Health, consumer and nutrition groups, World Health Organisation, the European Commission and several EU Member States advocate effective regulation of health and nutrition claims as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the diet of Europeans and reduce nutrition related ill health

Contact person: Lara Garrido- Herrero, EPHA

Email: lara@epha.org

Tel: 02 233 38 88

FAX 02/233 38 80

Mobile: 0499 15 09 74

