



2017
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Position Paper

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EDA comments on the Maltese Presidency's and Commission's draft proposal on 'Public procurement of food for health: technical report on the school setting'

While the European Dairy Association (EDA) welcomes the Maltese Presidency's and Commission's initiative in combating childhood obesity and ensuring the overall health of the youngest in our societies, this must be done in a comprehensive manner, that reflects the latest dietary recommendations and scientific evidence. Milk and dairy products are important sources of many essential nutrients, including protein, vitamins and minerals, and therefore significantly contribute to the health of children and adolescents. The importance of milk and dairy foods in children's diet, especially in the critical periods of growth and development, as well as their positive role in shaping positive dietary habits of future generations, should be particularly considered in the context of the current draft proposal.

Keeping in mind the nutritional and health related benefits of dairy for children and adolescents, we urge the Maltese presidency and the Commission to reconsider their proposed recommendations on public procurement when dealing with milk and dairy products. Not only are they limiting the availability of dairy in the diets of those who need them the most, but they undermine the well-established scientific evidence on the nutritional value of milk and dairy.

- **Offering school milk and making dairy foods a core component of school meals helps children consume a healthy and nutrient-rich diet.** Consumption of dairy foods contributes to overall diet quality and helps to achieve dietary recommendations. The school day can be long and the number of school meals hold a crucial role in providing the recommended amounts of nutrients. As it stands, many children in Europe already do not meet daily dietary recommendations, which may lead to unbalanced and inadequate intakes of nutrients, which in turn can hamper growth and development.
- **Dairy products provide a multitude of essential nutrients that are of vital significance to our health throughout the life cycle, but particularly during childhood and adolescent growth and developmental phases** (Fiorito et al.,2008), for instance:



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- **Dairy products are a primary source of highly bio-available calcium and provide 50% of children's total calcium intake** (Vissers P et al. 2011; Coudray B. et al., 2011). Calcium found in milk and dairy products has profound beneficial effects. Not only is calcium essential for healthy teeth, but in combination with amino acids and bioactive peptides, which are also found in milk, these contribute significantly to healthy bone growth in children/adolescents and even optimise their peak bone mass development. These processes are critical when considering the escalating levels of osteoporosis and bone fractures in the elderly population (Reginster and Burlet, 2006). In fact, growing scientific evidence suggests that **calcium and protein intake during childhood and puberty can significantly minimise the risk of future osteoporosis** (Rizzoli et al., 2014).
- **Dairy is also an important source of phosphorus, potassium, iodine, as well as vitamins B2 and B12.** In addition, dairy products provide children with **energy, high-quality protein, as well as with essential and non-essential fatty acids** (Dror and Allen, 2014), all of which are required for their nutritional well-being.
- **Studies have demonstrated a beneficial impact of yoghurt consumption on several cardiometabolic outcomes including a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension and stroke** (Gao et al. 2013; Aune et al. 2013) and no adverse effects on coronary heart disease (Soedamah Mathu et al. 2012).
- **Moreover, scientific evidence shows that dairy consumption does not cause obesity in children and adolescents.** On the contrary, recent scientific research has shown that **there is an inverse association between the consumption of milk and dairy products on indicators of body weight and adiposity.** A Portuguese study found that an increased consumption of milk by adolescents led to decreased risks of abdominal obesity (Abreu et al., 2013).
- **Consuming milk and dairy products in childhood helps children to develop a taste for milk and to adopt healthy eating habits later in life.** Studies show that parents influence the attitude of their children towards dairy and dairy intake. When parents regularly drink milk, their children also have higher intakes of milk and dairy foods (Reicks et al., 2011). Such developments are not only beneficial to the overall health of the population, but strengthen the vital European dairy market in its future endeavours.
- **Flavoured milks and yoghurts are not only a great way of increasing milk consumption among children and thus of enhancing the nutritional value of their diets, but also have significant beneficial health-related impacts.** Studies have demonstrated that the inclusion of flavoured milk drastically increases the total milk consumption and therefore **improves the overall dietary quality without any adverse impacts on weight** (Nicklas TA et al. 2013, Murphy et al. 2008).



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- **With decreasing amounts of milk being consumed in schools, we run the risk of children opting for less nutritional and overall healthy options.** In fact, when milk is removed from the diet, it is often replaced by potentially nutrient-poor, energy-dense options (Keller et al., 2009; Yen, 2002). Replacing milk with sweetened beverages leads to an increase in energy intake and to a decrease in calcium intake (Bray et al., 2004). Studies show that the steep rise in childhood obesity, coincides with the decline in dairy consumption and an increase in sweetened nutrient-poor beverage consumption (Malik et al., 2005).
- **More recently, the value of milk fat has increasingly been recognised with both whole-fat and low-fat yoghurts and cheeses, having been made a dietary priority** (Mozaffarian, 2016). The latest science seems to support the consumption of yoghurts and cheese, with the choice between low-fat and whole-fat depending on individual dietary needs.
- **As the draft guidelines for 'Public procurement of food for health' are an effort to improve the overall health and well-being of children, we feel that notions of origin and production methods are somewhat misplaced.** Not only is there no link between these and the nutritious qualities of milk and dairy products, but moreover, we do not believe that the guidelines should promote discrimination against products on the grounds of origin or production methods.
- While we do see the necessity of animal welfare protections at all stages, we do not share the need to make it an issue of consideration in these guidelines. Under EU law and private initiatives of various sectors, animal welfare is already assured at the highest level.
- We would like to note that animal welfare, as well as organic production methods, are also being addressed in the green public procurement guidelines of the Commission's DG ENVI. We believe that this would be a more suitable venue for addressing these issues, so as to allow the current proposal to effectively address health and nutrition-related issues.

Further reading

Additional information can be also found in the following EDA Factsheets on our website:

- [New European School Food Scheme](#)
- [Nutritional importance of milk and dairy products for children and adolescents](#)



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