

Press Release

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The EU dairy sector highlights the nutritional value of dairy and its importance in the diet - and thus refutes the proposed traffic light labelling by the Evolved Nutrition Labelling Initiative (ENL) as it is not adequate for better informing on global nutritional properties of milk and dairy products

The European Dairy Association (EDA) supports the consumers' right to be fully informed on the nutritional properties of foods which is one of the legal requirement of the Food Information to Consumers Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011. EDA believes that voluntary labelling schemes used in addition to the nutrition declaration required by the EU law can be a useful additional tool for consumers if they fulfil a number of important criteria: such a scheme should look at the food as a whole and support foods rich in essential nutrients. Thus, it needs to include both nutrients to encourage and nutrients to limit in a diet, be in line with official dietary recommendations as well as be scientifically substantiated and stimulate a healthy dietary pattern. A good voluntary labelling scheme should be thoroughly evaluated, have a significant positive impact on consumer behaviour and public health, be compatible with EU legislation and be supported by relevant stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the latest traffic lights scheme proposal by six multi-national food companies grouped in the Evolved Nutrition Labelling Initiative (ENL) does not fulfil these requirements and thus is not an adequate system for milk and dairy products.

EDA is fully engaged on nutrition and health topics with policy-makers, industry groups and other stakeholders to help make a positive impact on the overall public health. The health and nutrition debate has always been very close to the dairy industry¹. Over the last years, the European dairy sector has put a lot of effort, research and resources to ensure that consumers have access to a wide range of nutritious dairy products.

¹ See also

http://eda.euromilk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Public_Documents/Nutrition_Factsheets/EDA_Fact_sheet_on_nutrition_goals.pdf for more on nutrition goals from a public health perspective





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The European dairy sector has followed closely the recent discussions on the proposal for a new labelling scheme developed by six international food and drink companies, so called 'Evolved Nutrition Label Initiative' (ENL)². The proposal is an extension of the colour-coded UK traffic light system but with reference values including portions (and not only on 100g). The proposed system includes only the content of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt and fully ignores any positive nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals. Such a selective approach does not recognise the importance of nutrient-dense foods as recommended in dietary recommendations nor does it help consumers to compose a balanced and varied diet with nutritious foods. Traffic light-style schemes such as ENL are not in line with the principle of providing "objective and non-discriminatory" food information required by the EU legislation because the introduction of colour-coding is a non-objective judgment of the nutritional quality of products and unnecessarily discriminate certain foods. In addition, the UK traffic light system has not shown to change the consumer behaviour³, and no study so far proves that colour-coded and 'negative nutrient' based schemes indeed help to improve public health, as e.g. by reducing obesity⁴.

EDA Secretary general, Alexander Anton, highlights that it is well established that milk and dairy products are an important part of the dietary guidelines and recommendations across the EU⁵. The health benefits of milk and dairy have been continuously recognised in the recently evaluated European School Milk Scheme⁶. In a Western diet, dairy products provide between 40% and 70% of the recommended daily calcium intake. In some Member States dairy is also one of the main natural sources of iodine in the diet - the intake of iodine from milk and dairy products is up to 37%. Milk and dairy products are also natural sources of high quality protein and many essential vitamins and minerals. The proposed ENL scheme as currently presented has not been adapted to acknowledge the nutrient-rich foods and therefore is not adequate to milk and dairy products.

EDA considers that colour-coded systems, especially those focussing exclusively on nutrients 'to limit' and ignoring the overall nutrient contribution of foods, give misleading information to consumers. The ENL scheme has not reached its target of improving the UK traffic light scheme to give consideration of particular nutrition qualities of milk and dairy and therefore we find it not suitable for dairy products. It also induces confusing messages and possible errors in consumer understanding: a same product in the same shelf can display different results; it will encourage consumption

² <http://evolvednutritionlabel.eu/>

³ <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/24/4/344/575241/Impact-of-front-of-pack-traffic-light-nutrition>

⁴ For more on nutrition goals from a public health perspective see also http://eda.euromilk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Public_Documents/Nutrition_Factsheets/EDA_Fact_sheet_on_nutrition_goals.pdf

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http://eda.euromilk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Public_Documents/Nutrition_Factsheets/2017_08_30_EDA_Health_benefits_and_nutritional_value_of_dairy_final.pdf

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/milk/school-milk-scheme_en



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of soft drinks compared to milk, or salted biscuits compared to cheese, and generally encourage more turning to less nutritionally interesting options compared to consumption of wholesome foods.

We are aware that there are alternative positive labelling systems which consider the overall nutritional quality of foods in a more balanced way, without harmful discrimination of basic foods. We believe that systems which are worth further discussion and consideration by the interested stakeholders could be e.g. the Australian Health Star Rating scheme⁷ or Choices International logo⁸.

“There is seriously something wrong with a scheme where a diet soda drink ranks better than drinking milk”⁹, underlines Alexander Anton.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION

The European Dairy Association represents the interests of dairy processors in the European Union. The membership of EDA consists of the associations of dairy processors in EU Member States.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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⁷ <http://healthstarrating.gov.au/>

⁸ <https://www.choicesprogramme.org/>

⁹ In our draft calculations, the following results would show on diet soft drink (for fat- saturates, (total) sugars – salt): green-green-green-green, whereas for drinking milk it would be amber -red - amber -green for whole milk or green-amber-amber- green for semi-skimmed milk, and even skimmed milk does not allow 'only green' labelling

