

Health & Social Services Committee

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Date: Wednesday 5 October 2005

Venue: Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Reducing Salt in Food and Diet

Purpose

1. This paper is for information only. It has been prepared in order to update the Committee about the Food Standards Agency's programme of work to reduce salt intakes.

Summary / Recommendations

2. The paper describes the background to, and activities intended to encourage reduction of, the daily amounts of salt that the average person consumes. It specifically highlights the next phase of the public awareness campaign that is shortly to be launched.

Background

3. According to surveys (notably the National Diet and Nutrition Survey) the average adult consumer has a daily salt intake of 9.6 grams. About three-quarters of this comes from salt included in processed foods. Expert advice (most recently from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition) is that the daily requirement should be no more than 6 grams (and less for infants and younger children). The FSA Strategic Plan for 2005- 2010 contains a target: "to work with health departments and other stakeholders to reduce the average salt intake of UK adults from the current 9.5g to 6g per day by 2010, and to reduce salt intakes of children in line with SACN age specific recommendations, also by 2010. We will monitor progress to ensure we remain on course to achieve the target."

4. High intakes of salt are associated with increased blood pressure, and people with high blood pressure are at increased risk of developing heart disease or suffering strokes.

5. To achieve the desired reduction in intakes the Food Standards Agency has been working with the food industry – manufacturers and retailers – to encourage a reformulation of products. In addition a public awareness campaign was run in autumn 2004 centred on a cartoon character - Sid the Slug - highlighting that "too much salt is bad for your heart". The campaign involved advertising in a variety of media including TV, magazines and posters.

6. Evaluation conducted after the campaign had run identified a high spontaneous recall of the key

messages. Results from the Agency's 2004 Wales Consumer Attitudes Survey (the fieldwork for which overlapped with the campaign) also showed an increased level of consumer awareness of the need to eat less salt (up to 62% as compared with 47% in the 2003 survey). There was a corresponding improvement in the percentage of respondents claiming to be eating less salt (from 16% in 2003 to 25% in 2004).

Considerations:

7. Phase 2 of the FSA salt awareness campaign will be launched during the week commencing 10th October with advertising that will run until 20th November. The key messages are focused around 6g a day and will particularly encourage the public to check labels on ready meals. A UK wide television and poster advertising campaign has been confirmed, including coverage on ITV Wales and S4C in Wales. There will also be a major advertising/editorial feature with the Sun newspaper running over 3 weeks, and other advertising in UK womens' titles.

8. A new consumer-friendly leaflet will support this advertising campaign. Entitled

" Eatwell ", it will put salt into the context of a healthy balanced diet (with additional messages on fats and sugars)

9. The Agency is also working with UK Non-Governmental Organisations, including the National Federation of Women's Institutes and Blood Pressure Association, who have been allocated grants to support and promote the key campaign messages to specific audiences. These audiences have been identified as being "high risk" - in particular, older people (55+) and ethnic minorities. Known activity is planned as follows:

- National Federation of Women's Institutes - a 2 day 'Cascade Conference' (12th - 14th October) on salt and healthy eating which involves training representatives from every local WI and facilitating activity to ensure local delivery of messages.
- Blood Pressure Association – advertorials in Saga and Readers Digest linked to Blood Pressure Week in September.

10. The Agency has also had positive engagement with the food industry in relation to the salt campaign and the potential for parallel activity. Complementary/joint activity across the UK is expected with some well-known manufacturers as well as the major supermarkets, though specific details may not be agreed in all instances until close to the launch date.

Financial Implications

11. There are no financial implications from this information paper arising for the Assembly.

Action for Subject Committee

12. This paper is for noting.

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