

Pressklipp om konferensen om Obesity i Bryssel 1-2 december 2005

Activists call for uniform rules in fat fight

By Jeremy Grant in Washington

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A mother buying a Dairylea Lunchables ham and cheese pizza snack for her children in the US this weekend may not know it but the same Kraft product available in Britain contains 10 per cent less sodium.

To food and nutrition activists discrepancies in products that are essentially the same on both sides of the Atlantic is not merely a geographical oddity.

It strikes at the heart of what is wrong with efforts to tackle the growing obesity epidemic that is alarming governments in Europe and the US, with childhood obesity a particular source of concern. A third of Americans are obese, compared with 23 per cent of Britons.

Activists argue that multinational food companies that make improvements to their products - such as adding nutritional labelling or reducing unhealthy ingredients like cholesterol-raising trans fats - should do so everywhere they operate.

"When companies make such changes they typically fail to do so on a transatlantic basis," says Bruce Silverglade, legal counsel at the non-profit Center for Science in the Public Interest, a US-based lobby group. "Rather, most companies typically respond to national or regional pressures, whether they be mandatory regulations or exhortations by government officials."

Yesterday, the CSPI and the UK's Consumer Association co-chaired a meeting in Brussels of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue, a coalition of US and European consumer groups that makes recommendations to the US government and European Union on consumer and trade issues.

It urged efforts to deal with "the common problem of limited action by multinational food companies" by establishing a process that facilitates the enactment of laws and regulations that provide "the most effective public health protections to consumers" on both sides of the Atlantic.

Any solution will have to take account of an important difference between the US and Europe. Food companies in the US operate in a laissez-faire environment of self-regulation.

By contrast, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs Markos Kyprianou in January gave the food industry a year to stop targeting junk food advertising to children and improve labelling - or face new laws.

Kraft has taken the lead in addressing obesity on a voluntary basis, pledging in September to extend a ban on advertising junk food to the under-12s to its websites aimed at children. McDonald's will in February become the first fast food chain to put nutritional content on its food packaging.

This week it became the sole corporate sponsor of Shape Up, a three-year programme backed by the European Commission aimed at encouraging improved diet and exercise to combat childhood obesity.

Kraft says it favours a more uniform approach to nutritional information and health claims - if not necessarily on content. The discrepancy in the sodium content of its Lunchables, for example, is partly due to different tastes.

CONSUMER GROUP DEMANDS RESTRICTIONS ON JUNK FOOD ADVERTISING
Louise Barnett, PA Consumer Affairs Correspondent, Press Association
December 2, 2005

A European consumer group called today for mandatory restrictions on adverts for unhealthy children's food.

The existing system put parents across the continent under pressure to buy products high in salt, sugar and fat, the European consumers' organisation BEUC said.

This makes it hard to tackle obesity and encourage healthy eating, the consumer group added.
Speaking at the Generation Excess conference in Brussels, BEUC director Jim Murray criticised the high volume of promotions for unhealthy foods.

He blamed some manufacturers for their "abusive" use of health and nutrition claims on food packaging.

Mr Murray said the use of celebrity endorsements, cartoon characters and free toys as marketing tactics encouraged children to pester their parents.

Describing the food industry's approach, Mr Murray said: "We have no desire to attack their profits as such but they must sell fewer calories, less salt, less sugar and less fat.

"This objective will only be achieved by mandatory regulation, as part of a wider series of initiatives by industry itself and others."

Children's food marketing is a contributing factor to the current nutrition and obesity crisis in Europe, BEUC said.

Hugh Rossiter, head of media at Ofcom, today said the UK regulator was in discussion the food industry, Government departments and agencies over food advertising aimed at children.

He said: "This is a large and complex subject involving input from a range of parties.

"Ofcom is continuing to talk to those parties to develop the appropriate approach and we plan to publish our consultation early in 2006."