



# Improving food product composition across the EU

Improving product composition across the EU asks for strong concerted action until the healthy choice is the easy choice. During the EU presidency in the first semester of 2016, The Netherlands is looking forward to work together with both public and private partners and non-governmental organizations (ngo's) towards a plan of action to take food product improvement to the next level.

## Introduction

The high prevalence of (childhood) obesity and other non-communicable diseases in Europe is of serious concern. Dietary factors – including too high intakes of salt, saturated fat and calories – play an important role in this context, alongside other lifestyle-related factors.

The EU White Paper on a Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues (2007) addresses action that can be taken at local, regional, national and European levels. It advocates a partnership approach; no single organization can tackle the challenges in this field alone.

One of the priorities in the Strategy is 'making the healthier option available', aiming at (reformulating and innovating) the nutrient content of foods. Most, if not all, EU Member States are working nationally in their own way to contribute towards achieving population intake levels and dietary patterns in line with recommendations of national authorities, European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and/or the World Health Organization (WHO). There are still many steps to take to reach the status of the healthy choice being easy across the EU. It is time for strong concerted action at EU level.



## **Continue to focus on product improvement**

### ***Public health***

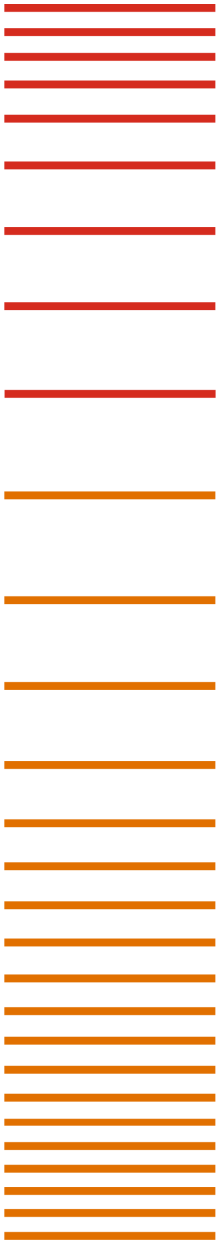
The Netherlands is of the opinion that product improvement – reducing salt, saturated fats and calories in different product groups - is an important goal that we should continue focusing on. High availability of improved products will contribute to the health and wellbeing of the whole population. This will for instance affect children by their school meals and will also reach people that are less focused on actively making the healthier choice. Product innovation will contribute to a healthy EU population and workforce and therefore contribute to the EU priorities on growth, jobs and investment.

### ***Internal Market***

Because of international trade of food products, food operators benefit from a harmonized situation in the EU. Different approaches ((self) regulations, taxes) in various Member States will ask different production lines with subsequent costs. Strong concerted action will stimulate healthy product innovation and should create a truly facilitating environment. In the long-term The Netherlands would like to work towards standards that guarantee a minimum nutritional quality of products within the EU with respect to salt, saturated fat levels and energy content.

*In the short term, The Netherlands advocates to:*

☐ cooperate with both public partners, private partners and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) to build a shared roadmap for action



- continue and expand a strong network of cooperation between Member States and (inter-)national food operators, in order to facilitate the EU-internal market by a shared focus on healthier product composition;
- benefit from the existing High Level Group and Platform on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the High Level Forum on the better functioning of the Food Chain;
- build on the Commission's, the Member States, and Platform Members experiences of the last years, towards an evidence based plan of action;
- profit from results of the research that is performed in this field within the EU Research Programme.

We look forward to discuss the content of a roadmap for action with involved stakeholders to take food product improvement to the next level.

### **Netherlands presidency conference 22-23 February 2016, Amsterdam**

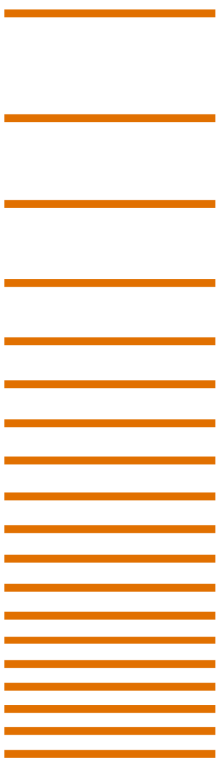
During the Dutch presidency of the European Union in the first semester of 2016, Minister Edith Schippers will host a high level conference on product improvement. During this conference, public and private stakeholders will discuss together to come to a common understanding of the next steps to be taken.

### **Background and state of play**

The Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity (2007) advocates a partnership approach; no single organization can tackle the challenges in this field alone. The European Commission acted upon this




and brought together representatives of Member States in the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity (HLG) and European umbrella associations of private actors and NGO's in the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. In these interlinked fora best practices are exchanged, engagement is facilitated and commitments are stimulated.



In the mean time the Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers (EU No1169/2011) has been revised, aiming at harmonized, clear and understandable information for the consumer. This contributes to making the healthier choice an easier choice, both at the point of purchase and at home. In the High Level Group a Salt reduction Framework, a Framework on Selected Nutrients and a subsequent annex on saturated fats were concluded. An additional annex on sugar and energy is currently being discussed. Member States work separately on their policies around the topics covered in these EU frameworks on national initiatives on selected nutrients. Large differences between Member States should be taken into account, both with respect to culture typical food products and habits and current intake levels and subsequent taste expectations from the consumers.

Meanwhile, in the EU platform, several commitments on food reformulation are active<sup>1</sup>. In 2013 and 2014 (till end of September) one new commitment on reformulation was made. At the Expert meeting on reformulation in Brussels February 17 2015 there was broad support for a continued focus on reformulation in the EU and the HLG. To give follow up to this, the



European Commission and the Netherlands are jointly working on an overview on the current state of play across Europe, to enhance an evidence based approach.

Elements that are taken into account are policies and governance on product improvement in various member states, current product composition across EU (nutrient composition), comparison of criteria used to create or distinguish healthier products and cross border trade of manufactured foods within the EU. The results of this analysis will be discussed in the HLG and Platform. Besides the above mentioned EU platform and HLG, the High Level Forum for Better Functioning Food Supply Chain can be a good platform to discuss initiatives with stakeholders as well.

1[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/nutrition/platform/database/dsp\\_search.cfm?CFID=100286&CFTOKEN=27468115&jsessionid=090c387b692cdaf578942067644949633366TR](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/platform/database/dsp_search.cfm?CFID=100286&CFTOKEN=27468115&jsessionid=090c387b692cdaf578942067644949633366TR)