

## **HLSG 7 - Salt Reduction Pledge and the Catering Sector**

### **Aim**

This note outlines the outcome of discussions with some caterers and their suppliers about the salt reduction pledge and invites the HLSG's views on further work with them to develop a collective pledge specifically for the catering sector.

### **Issue**

A number of key catering companies and their suppliers have indicated that they are not able to sign the salt pledge and meet all of the salt targets. Some of the reasons for this are set out in the background below. Many of these companies have been actively involved in salt reduction over recent years, continue to be so, and have expressed a willingness to continue this work as they recognise its importance to public health.

Food from caterers makes a significant contribution to our daily diets and it is important that caterers and their suppliers play their part in reducing consumer's salt intakes. If they are unable to participate in the Responsibility Deal there is a risk that salt reduction work will no longer be considered a priority by this sector and may even stop. The importance of progress across the whole food industry, and action to tackle differential salt levels in products between the different sectors, have long been raised as areas of concern. Reducing intakes by a further 1g per person per day compared to 2007 levels in food requires action across all sectors.

Some catering companies have asked whether there is scope to:

- develop a bespoke pledge for the catering sector, which better reflects its diversity and the broader opportunities it has to deliver salt reduction (this might span procurement, kitchen practice, menu options, availability of salt to consumers, information measures, training); or
- make individual pledges, similar to the commitments to healthier catering they have made to Government in previous years.

To-date the Food Network has only considered individual pledges from companies that represent progress beyond the collective pledges.

**Q Does the HLSG consider that work should be undertaken with caterers and their suppliers to develop a salt pledge specifically for this sector?**

**Q Are you content for officials to take this forward and report back to a later HLSG meeting?**

### **Background**

#### **Why are caterers saying they are unable to sign the salt pledge?**

During discussions with partners to encourage further sign up to the salt reduction pledge, a number of obstacles have been highlighted to caterers and their suppliers signing the pledge, these include:

- historically many caterers started work on salt reduction after the manufacturing and retail sectors, and have adopted an approach tailored to their business, so they have further to go to meet the 2012 targets across all products;
- For those companies with extensive product ranges, and higher recipe turnover (sometimes greater than for retailers) combined with more limited resources mean that it is not possible to reformulate all products by 2012. In contrast companies with very narrow product ranges are unable to meet sales weighted average targets;
- not all companies have information on salt levels of final products/meals to measure against the targets;
- there are some technical issues specific to the catering sector eg sliced cheese packed slice on slice has to have higher salt levels than cheese slices packed in plastic sleeves, sold by retailers. Caterers are also dependent on manufacturers who supply to them having met the targets first. This is a particular issue where foods are imported products eg a speciality hard pressed cheese;
- international companies are restricted to recipe specifications that apply to a number of countries;
- bespoke products produced by suppliers are made to customer's specifications, and are subject to development Chefs requirements. Chefs tend to have a high salt palate, and are recognised as an obstacle to salt reduction;
- control of kitchen chef practices is difficult to achieve;
- meals out of home are perceived as indulgences by consumers and may include larger amounts of high salt products eg cured meat products, and cheese. Gradual stepwise progress is needed, particularly for iconic products. We know that consumer acceptance is closely linked to the timescale over which reductions are made; and
- customers may visit catering establishments infrequently (perhaps only every 6 months) and may choose not to revisit a certain restaurant if they consider the food to be bland. In contrast, they are likely to simply choose alternate products at their regular supermarket. The business risks around consumer acceptance therefore differ between sectors.