

HLSG 4 - Update on the Fruit and Vegetable Work Stream

A short paper was circulated to the High Level Steering Group after a brief discussion at the 15 March meeting. This paper has been updated to reflect comments from the HLSG. Previous preliminary discussions within the Food Network had taken place on developing a pledge to promote consumption of fruit and vegetables. These discussions took into account the outcome of wider Government initiatives such as the Defra fruit and vegetable task force (which includes promoting healthy frozen and canned fruit and vegetables, and inclusion of composite foods in the 5 a day scheme) and Change4Life (which incorporates 5 a day messaging, and encourages partners to include messaging in its own communications).

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey from 2001 found average consumption to be 2.7 portions for men and 2.9 for women. The 2008/9 survey found there had been little change to these levels. When consumption from composite foods was taken into account in 2008/9 levels increased to 4.4 portions, with a range of 0.9 to 10.2 portions for men and 0.3 to 8.3 for women. The proportion of people meeting the 5 a day guideline was 7% of girls and 22% of boys aged 11-18 years, and 33% of women and 37% of men.

A small group of industry representatives have met with DH officials to discuss further ideas for increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables as part of a pledge for phase 2 of the Food Network. The group considered that an overarching pledge to create the right environment to enable and encourage people to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables could be delivered through a menu of options reflecting the diversity of the different sectors and the range of products that can contribute. The HLSG has confirmed its support for this approach.

The pledge agreed by the industry group was as follows:

‘To create the right environment to enable and encourage people to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables’

The group identified three areas where activity might be focused within the menu of options, namely:

- Promoting fruit and vegetables through incentives and information;
- Increasing accessibility of fruit and vegetables to all sectors of the community;
- Making it easier for consumers to achieve their 5 a day target.

To date, as part of the Responsibility Deal, an individual pledge was submitted by the Association of Convenience Stores to commit to work with its members to roll out Change4Life (C4L) branding into 1000 stores, learning from the successful ACS/DH programme to improve fruit and vegetable availability in deprived areas. This will mean that stores in the convenience

sector will give more space and prominence to fruit and vegetable sales, and use C4L branding at the heart of local communities. It will ensure that consumers in more areas of the country have access to good quality, affordable fresh fruit and vegetables.

We have received other proposals for individual pledges and would like these to be captured within this workstream as part of a menu of options mentioned above which underpin an overarching pledge. We have started working with the retailers in the first instance in the development of pledges, and will shortly begin discussions with food manufacturers, caterers and suppliers. Another potential avenue are the producers of fruit and vegetables with which we would also explore with Defra in its responsibility for the Task Force on fruit and vegetables. The frozen food industry also have an important role to play and we will be engaging with this sector too.

In addition to potential public pledges on promotion of fruit and vegetables, other areas for focus might include working with workplace caterers in conjunction with the Health at Work Network to encourage increased uptake of fruit and vegetables, and reformulation of composite dishes to increase fruit and vegetable levels.

The HLSG has indicated its support for a phased approach in agreeing the menu of options with different sectors for this work stream rather than completing a programme of engagement with retailers, food manufacturers and caterers before finalising the menu. This recognises that some sectors may wish to launch pledges more quickly than others. The HLSG also recognised the need for the menu of options to be specific so that it is clear what is expected and that the implementation of these can be measured and assessed.

As part of the engagement, we will hold a workshop, similar to that held recently for the calorie reduction work, to discuss how companies might begin to consider what their contributions might be. This might also include a discussion on how more information can be provided to consumers about increasing their fruit and vegetable consumption. While there is messaging on 5 a day, within Change 4 Life and on NHS Choices Government this is limited in relation to new marketing activity due to the current restrictions. It may be appropriate for information to be provided to consumers as part of new pledges to help increase awareness.