

## **HLSG 4 - Salt Pledge for Caterers**

### **Issue**

In June HLSG members expressed support, in principle, to the development of a pledge specifically for caterers assuming that the existing pledge would not be undermined. This paper updates the HLSG on progress.

### **Latest developments**

The British Hospitality Association and DH have held a series of meetings over the summer with a limited number of catering businesses across the sector (pub, quick service, casual dining, coffee and sandwich shops, catering suppliers and contract caterers). The meetings explored a range of different approaches to the development of a pledge, to best take into account the opportunities and difficulties on salt reduction faced by this sector.

It has not been possible to achieve a consensus that all companies could sign up to, however a draft pledge reflecting those elements which most companies could support is attached at Annex 1 for consideration. Details of the discussions are given below. Two issues could not be resolved in the time available, and require further consideration, these are:

- 1) Setting a realistic ambition for meeting a proportion of the targets by 2012. Proposals of 70-80% have been received so far and many businesses are still actively considering this issue with a view to obtaining internal agreement; and
- 2) whether it is possible to develop a pledge specifically for catering suppliers that better meets their needs.

**The HLSG is invited to note the progress in developing a draft pledge (at Annex 1).**

**Further consultation is planned to gather views on the pledge from:**

**HLSG members  
Select NGOs  
BHA members**

**BHA /officials will report on progress to the November meeting of the HLSG**

## **Background**

### **Consultation**

Discussions with catering businesses have mainly focused on a limited number of larger businesses many of whom have been actively involved in salt reduction. The acceptability of the approach adopted in the draft pledge has not been tested with small/ medium sized businesses or companies who have already signed up to the existing salt targets. As discussion has centred on the broad principles of the pledge further refinement of the wording may be appropriate.

A broad range of approaches were considered for the salt pledge, including:

- simply providing additional guidance to support the existing salt reduction pledge;

- a phased approach to meet the salt targets for procured products and final meals /products over a longer timeframe;
- adoption of a single target which represented an overall reduction in the volume of salt used by each businesses, and which offered complete flexibility as to how this would be delivered;
- extending the scope of the pledge to include additional mechanisms for salt reduction including kitchen practice, menu planning, information provision, chef training etc

Further details of the issues and approaches considered are at Annex 2

In summary discussions showed that it is not possible to develop a single pledge to suit all business models and current salt reduction plans. The key issues relevant to this sector have already been outlined in paper HLSG 7 (circulated at the June meeting), and the main concerns to influence the drafting of the pledge were:

- businesses remain supportive of salt reduction, and have made significant progress in recent years;
- businesses do not believe that all targets can be met, therefore a pledge which covered a proportion of the targets was more appropriate. The reasons cited included: technical issues, consumer acceptability, leverage with manufacturers/suppliers, impact of business plans and reformulation cycles; the breadth, turnover and popularity of businesses products and the impact this has on their ability to meet the targets;
- availability (or lack) of data about the salt levels in products and final dishes, the resource implications and ongoing costs. This will affect the proportion of targets that can be identified as met, and signage by businesses with multiple brands;
- the timescale to meet the pledge. Caterers may have larger reductions to make in comparison with retailers or manufacturers, and small stepwise reductions are required in this sector, which is particularly sensitive to consumer reaction;
- a range of additional salt reduction activities may be possible depending upon the type of business model.<sup>1</sup>

The draft pledge also recognises the need for additional support from Government to help companies identify the targets which apply to their products, and to make available information about salt and health for training purposes.

### **Catering suppliers**

While the draft pledge was, in principle, broadly acceptable to many restaurant businesses<sup>2</sup>, some catering suppliers would prefer to have a pledge specifically for their sub-sector. Some suggestions as to the areas a pledge for suppliers might cover are :

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<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to quantify the effect this, or the salt targets, may have on the amount of salt removed from the market by caterers, to compare with the effect of the salt targets on the retail/manufacturing sector.

<sup>2</sup> Subject to agreement on the proportion of targets that must be met

- a focus on salt reduction in highest selling lines; and
- an X % reduction may be possible either overall or in some lines, but this may/ not result in the 2012 targets being met.

Provision of

- advice on salt reduction in websites, magazines and other marketing material,
- handling instructions that do not include adding salt,
- recipe and menu suggestions that provide information on salt contents and have controlled amounts of salt within the recipe;
- training of staff, and customers about salt reduction;
- continued provision of information about salt levels in products, to enable caterers to estimate the salt content of their dishes and meals; and
- highlighting those products within their portfolio which meet the targets (where possible).

This approach would offer a collective pledge for manufacturer suppliers, but would need to include substantial additional flexibility to be suitable for procurement advisory companies (who procure but do not produce foods for other businesses).

### **Additional proposals**

In addition to specific pledges, some have also suggested that there is a need for greater recognition by Government of businesses progress. This could include the opportunity for businesses to publish a statement (perhaps including quantitative elements) outlining progress towards pledges/salt reduction activity on the Department's website. This would allow caterers who may not be in a position to sign up to a collective pledge to demonstrate their continued support for, and progress on, salt reduction.

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

## **Annex 1**

### **Draft salt pledge for caterers and their suppliers**

*We commit to meet the salt targets for the end of 2012 agreed by the Responsibility Deal, in at least X% ( $X = 70-80\%$ ) of our products, and will continue to work to meet the remaining targets beyond the deadline of 2012 wherever possible. We will focus future reformulation activity on those products that contribute the most salt across our product range. For some products this will require acceptable technical solutions, to ensure the availability of products/ingredients which meet the salt targets.*

*Opportunities in addition to the salt targets are available to caterers and their suppliers to help reduce consumers' salt intakes. We will adopt those practices that are relevant to our business model including:*

- *Kitchen practices*
- *Salt availability*
- *Chef training*
- *Provision of information to our customers*
- *Menu planning*
- *Other relevant actions*

*We will indicate when signing up to this pledge which of these additional elements, that contribute to salt reduction, we will implement and seek to build on them annually. Each business will provide a broad outline of its plans, and the timescale for delivery.*

*These activities will help to promote changes in consumers' palates (towards less salty foods) that will be essential if we are to succeed in delivering this pledge.*

*We recognise that achieving the public health goal of consuming no more than 6g of salt per person per day will necessitate action across the whole industry, Government, NGOs and individuals.*

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### **How we envision this pledge will work**

#### **Restaurant kitchen practice:**

We will adopt the following kitchen practices:

- vegetables and boiled starchy carbohydrates such as rice, potatoes and pasta will be cooked without added salt
- procure lower salt stocks in place of existing products
- the amount of salt used in our kitchens will be reduced by at least 15% [within a specified 2yr period]

#### **Salt availability:**

We will encourage behaviour change among consumers in the use of discretionary salt by ensuring that salt (cellars, sachet etc) remain out of sight and is made available only at customers direct request

#### **Chef training:**

We commit to train all of our chefs/staff on

- the importance of salt reduction for heart health and recommended dietary intakes
- foods which are high in salt or contribute significantly to the diet
- how to reduce the levels of salt in their dishes/items, and achieve changes in palate
- developing menus which are lower in salt and include lower salt options

### **Provision of information to our customers**

This may include provision of:

- nutrition information by suppliers about the salt content of their products, and particularly those products which meet the salt targets
- information to consumers by caterers; salt levels in dishes, or highlighting lower salt options on menus, websites etc.

### **Menu/range planning**

We will look at opportunities to reduce the salt content of our menu/product range for example by:

- reformulation of existing products
- ensuring all new products meet the salt targets
- taking innovative approaches on meal deals /combinations which have the potential to reduce consumers salt intakes compared to existing or most popular choices (eg salads /vegetables and lower salt side dishes in preference to higher salt alternatives)
- focusing promotional activity on healthier lower salt products

### **What Government will do:**

- explore with BHA/businesses how best to advise them about which salt categories apply to their products
- support businesses by making available information about the importance of salt reduction for heart health, recommended dietary intakes and those foods that are high in salt or contribute significantly to the diet.

## **Background**

This pledge is open to businesses within the foodservice sector including: caterers (pubs, casual dining, coffee and sandwich shops, quick service restaurants etc). It applies to those foods which are covered by the salt target categories.

This pledge does not replace the original salt reduction pledge published on 15 March 2011, but complements it. Companies already signed up to the original salt reduction pledge may additionally sign up to the salt pledge for caterers.

For the purposes of this pledge, a product includes a raw material or ingredient (e.g. bread, cheese, bacon etc.), an element of a recipe (eg a pre-prepared sauce or component of a dish), a meal centre or complete meal. This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

## Annex 2



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