

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

### **Aim**

This paper updates HLSG members on progress to develop the salt catering pledge.

### **Actions following the last meeting**

At the HLSG meeting in September it was agreed that further consultation would be undertaken on the salt catering pledge to gather views from: HLSG members, specific non-government organisations (NGOs) and British Hospital Association members (BHA).

#### *Views of HLSG members and NGOs*

Officials discussed the salt catering pledge with representatives from the British Retail Consortium, Cancer UK, Consensus Action on Salt and Health, the Food and Drink Federation and Which? The views expressed varied widely. Some could accept the pledge as a mechanism to increase engagement by the catering sector in salt reduction, on the condition that substantial sign up is achieved across the catering sector. However, others felt that caterers should meet all of the 2012 targets and should be allowed an additional year to achieve them (until end of 2013), in recognition that salt reduction in this sector commenced later than for manufacturers and retailers. In addition, it was proposed that caterers should meet the maximum targets for bread<sup>1</sup> by 2012, and that whole meals must contain less than 2.40 g of salt per portion<sup>2</sup>.

NGOs felt that it is vital to achieve a level playing field across the food industry and that allowing hospitality companies to meet only some of the targets would serve commercial interests at the expense of public health, while also making it impossible to demonstrate progress. They were also concerned that progressive companies who had signed up to the original salt pledge may seek to switch to what they saw as a more lenient approach. It was anticipated that if voluntary commitments from business were not met within an agreed period, consideration would be given to a regulatory approach.

#### *Discussion with BHA members and the wider catering sector*

Two meetings were held with a range of catering companies and their suppliers on the 16th November. Discussion focussed upon how the pledge might be applied to individual businesses. Some minor amendments were proposed to the pledge, by way of clarification and these are highlighted in the revised text in the Annex. The pledge will require some minor changes to ensure the presentation is consistent with other pledges before it is finalised.

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<sup>1</sup> Bread was singled out because of its contribution to the diet

<sup>2</sup> The threshold for defining a portion as red for salt within the traffic light criteria for Front of Pack labelling – which would account for 40% of an adults recommended maximum intake.

Many companies needed more time to assess their products against the targets, before they could indicate whether the pledge was achievable. Officials agreed to provide companies with a spreadsheet to assist them. A number of companies expressed concerns about the burden of monitoring the pledge, and wanted both flexibility and a light touch. For those with very large numbers of ingredients and dishes the acceptability of the pledge would be dependent upon the monitoring arrangements.

BHA undertook to consult companies and report on the potential level of sign up at the HLSG meeting.

Although a wide range of caterers were invited to attend meetings, (including non-BHA members) to ensure broad coverage of suppliers, high street names and contract catering companies, the response was limited. Of the 68 companies invited to meetings 12 attended, of which 4 are already signatories of the original salt pledge.

## **Annex**

### **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 70% 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 envisage 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.

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. **The Government does not recommend the use of potassium based salt replacers to achieve salt reduction in products. These products are not suitable for certain groups of the population and do not help consumer palates adjust to less salty flavours.**

