



Brussels Wednesday, 17 June 2020

FRONT-OF-PACK NUTRITION LABELLING: NUTRI-SCORE CAN BE A TOOL BUT SHOULD NOT OUTSHINE BACK-OF-PACK INFORMATION

In its May 2020 Communication on a Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, the European Commission aims at empowering consumers to make informed, healthy and sustainable food choices notably by proposing a harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme.

Ahead of the discussions that will take place on this topic, CEFS shares below the position of the EU sugar producers, who fully support consumers' informed choices and see the Nutri-Score as a tool to complement the nutritional information, but call for caution that such simplification does not outshine the comprehensive and necessary information of the back-of-pack.

1. CEFS supports consumers' informed choices.

CEFS is supportive of initiatives that promote and facilitate consumers' informed choices. Moreover, CEFS is of the opinion that front-of-pack information may contribute to the overall consumers information.

However, CEFS worries about front-of-pack schemes if, by focusing only on certain nutrients, they distract consumers from the comprehensive information provided on the back-of-pack (which actually empowers them to select foods and drinks that best suit their dietary needs). We are particularly concerned if front-of-pack schemes have the potential of misleading consumers by letting foods with similar nutritional properties be assessed differently.

2. Given the importance of energy intake in weight gain, the consumer should be able to readily view the energy content of the product next to any FOP scheme.

The discussion about front of pack labelling schemes has to be seen in the context of overweight and obesity and the search for contributing to a solution. CEFS supports this overall aim. Indeed, fighting overweight and obesity is crucial because it is at the origin of diet-related noncommunicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer.

Obesity is a complex and multifactorial issue, but in the end always caused by an imbalance between energy intake (consumption of all types of food and beverages) and energy expenditure (the energy our body actually uses), resulting in a positive energy balance.

Therefore, CEFS is of the view that the consumer should be able to clearly view the energy content of the product purchased next to the FOP scheme.

3. The Nutri-Score can be a tool to complement the comprehensive information on the back-of-pack.

In the current context where FOP schemes are gaining increasing importance, CEFS sees that the Nutri-Score is receiving considerable support and notes that the Nutri-Score can be one tool to inform the consumer.

The use of the Nutri-Score should however not outshine:

- the need for the nutritional information provided on the back-of-pack which avoids consumer misleading, i.e. the nutrition declaration and the list of ingredients, where much more information is given, such as energy, fibre content and presence of additives and allergens,
- the focus that public health authorities must give to promoting and facilitating physical activity and education about nutrition and health.

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