

Response from Macra na Feirme to the BAI Children's Commercial Communications Code Consultation Document

Macra na Feirme believes the classification of cheese as a 'less healthy' food under the proposed BAI's Nutritional Profiling Model is nonsensical as it totally undermines the many benefits of cheese in the diet of children. Nutritional, economic and scientific evidence points to the many positive benefits of cheese, therefore cheese should be exempt from the final nutritional profiling model.

There are many positive relationships between cheese and society in general. Ongoing and completed scientific research highlights the many health benefits of cheese particularly for children. Cheese has many healthy nutritional aspects other than its fatty contents. There are many important nutrients in cheese that are vital for young people. Cheese has nutrients like carbohydrates, proteins, fat soluble vitamins, B vitamins, calcium, iron and phosphorus. Cheese has all the amino acids needed for the body to stay fit.

Calcium intake is essential throughout life but is critically important in the diet of children and teenagers. Insufficient calcium intake amongst Irish children is a public health nutrition concern. Cheese contains large amounts of calcium which is vital for developing stronger bones and teeth in a young person's body. Cheese is a preventer of osteoporosis. Dairy products are highly recognised for their contribution to calcium intake. Banning the advertising of a dairy product such as cheese to children is not based upon sound principles.

Nutritional advice indicates that a portion of cheddar cheese provides a concentrated source of calcium totalling 207mg which equates to 26% of the RDA for a 1-10 year old and 17% of the RDA for an 11-17 year old. Cheese related amendments to the code are vital to ensure children consume their required five portions of dairy each day.

Evidence has shown that extracts of cheese suppresses appetite which is a health benefit for people with obesity. While childhood obesity has been increasing, cheese intake has remained static, indicating no correlation between cheese consumption and obesity levels. Dairy components including cheese have been shown to boost the immune system which is of huge benefit to young people as it prevents many forms of illness and disease which they may be exposed to. There is ongoing research to clearly identify the health benefits of cheese like those outlined above.

Classifying cheese in the proposed nutrient profiling model as 'less healthy' while a product like diet cola does not fall into the 'less healthy' classification appears to Macra na Feirme as ludicrous.

Also Ireland has a reputation for producing quality healthy natural dairy products and restricting the advertising of these products would have an impact on our largest indigenous export industry when there are no justified nutritional grounds for doing so. The proposed ban would undermine the planned growth in Irish cheese exports and potentially damage our International reputation for exporting safe, quality and healthy food. Irelands' target under Food Harvest 2020 is to produce food to feed 50 million people. Restricting the advertising of cheese and classifying it as a 'less healthy' product will have a damaging impact on Ireland's dairy industry reputation.

It is Macra na Feirme view that the BAI has two options opened to them:

1. Retain UK nutritional profile model and exempt cheese from this model
2. Development of an independent Irish nutritional profile model that takes account of the nutritional benefits of cheese

Internationally there are examples where amendments to nutritional profile models have been made such as New Zealand and Australia to take account of the nutritious aspect of cheese such as the strong calcium component, therefore there is no reason why Ireland cannot modify the proposed BAI UK model.

To conclude, Macra na Feirme's issue with the Children's Commercial Communications code is the proposed classification of cheese as a 'less healthy' food when assessed under the proposed UK Nutritional Profiling Model while a product like diet cola is classified as 'healthy' with no advertising restrictions. Macra na Feirme believes this is sending the wrong message and confusing consumers and families while totally undermining the extensive range of nutritional benefits of cheese in children's diets. Macra na Feirme is totally opposed to restricting the advertising of cheese to children.