

High Level Steering Group 15 May: Item 3.

The Work Programme of the Food Network

Introduction

1. Further to discussion of the work programme at the February meeting of the High Level Steering Group, this paper:
 - reiterates key points about the aims of the programme
 - presents the identified priorities as a unified and complete package for the foreseeable future (taking the current Parliament ending May 2015 as an indicative timeframe)
 - proposes a shape and sequencing to the work programme and delivery of pledges for discussion and agreement
 - considers the related issue of how we work and structures to support the work plan.
2. The aim is to provide clarity for all contributors to the Food Network, and particularly to allow current or potential pledge signatories to plan their efforts and deployment of resources accordingly.

Aims and priorities of the work programme

3. The work programme is aimed at improving health and wellbeing through action to enable and encourage healthier diet in ways amenable to a partnership approach and recognising the reach and influence of the food and drink industry. This is part of broader national and international efforts to prevent and control the burden of non-communicable diseases and alignment with external priorities is desirable.
4. The identified nutritional priorities are:
 - calorie reduction (with a related role for labelling) to tackle excess weight
 - salt reduction to reduce high blood pressure linked to cardiovascular disease
 - removal of artificial trans fats and reduction of saturated fat, to prevent cardiovascular disease, and
 - increased consumption of fruit and vegetables to improve overall health including reducing risk of cardiovascular disease and some cancers.
5. Key underpinning mechanisms for action in pursuit of the nutritional priorities are summarised by the previously agreed “pillars”, namely:
 - information to consumers
 - content of food
 - improving the food environment
 - promotion of healthier food choices.

6. While it can be invidious to prioritise, calorie reduction and salt reduction are the aims which appear to balance the greatest need for improvement with the greatest scope for progress. However, taken together, action in relation to these nutritional priorities, and via the underpinning mechanisms, comprise a holistic package to shift the diet in England closer to public health goals with the aim of reducing the burden of diet-related disease.

Progress to date

7. At the time of writing, there were 44 partners signed-up to delivery of out of home calorie labelling; 74 partners signed-up to salt reduction, and 93 partners signed-up to removal of artificial trans fats. Monitoring templates covering the first year of activity are being received and will be published on the Department of Health website. 17 partners comprised an initial tranche of signatories to the calorie reduction pledge, and have since been joined by an 18th signatory (United Biscuits).
8. A pledge to increase intake of fruit and vegetables is in the final stage of development (and features elsewhere on the agenda). Subject to agreement, we will be seeking to identify a credible response from business with a view to announcing early signatories soon.

Shape and sequencing of future work programme

9. At the February meeting we discussed the following shape to the work programme:
 - (a) a dominant focus on delivery and broadening commitment to *existing pledges and those close to being finalised* - gaining more signatories and making further progress on delivery including salt reduction pledges for the catering sector, and maximising sign-up to the new fruit and vegetables pledge
 - (b) progressing efforts in existing priority areas, notably salt
 - (c) work completing coverage of the initial list of 'priority nutrients', notably saturated fat
 - (d) a new workstream on promotion of food which would add value to existing pledges
 - (e) responding to emerging issues which would benefit from collective agreement/ action, notably front-of-pack labelling following the European Food Information Regulation (FIR).
10. The above list presents a range of opportunities in pursuit of the identified nutritional priorities with several linkages and synergies between them. However, rather than seeking to advance on all fronts at once it seems to

us that agreeing a sensible sequencing of new work (alongside a continued focus on delivery existing pledges) will best result in a realistic programme and delivery, and therefore propose the following:

- new fruit and vegetables pledge – subject to HLSG agreement, early signatories to be announced Summer 2012
- salt pledge(s) for caterers – subject to HLSG agreement, early signatories to be announced in next few months
- consideration of further progress on salt reduction (bearing in mind that the existing pledge will not deliver sufficient reduction to take us to 6g per day), with a view to a decision on the way forward by Christmas 2012
- work to develop a collective pledge on saturated fat reduction during Q2-4, for finalisation by Easter 2013
- the Department of Health will be consulting on front of pack labelling during Spring/ Summer 2012, and will bring a paper on the outcomes from the consultation to HLSG in Autumn 2012 for consideration of appropriate action through the Food Network
- similarly the Department will begin work in 2012 on a new workstream on promotion of food, involving the HLSG and Food Network as appropriate.

The comments of HLSG members would be welcome on the above shape and sequencing of the work programme.

Food Network structures and ways of working

11. In agreeing a new work programme, it is also timely to consider how we are structured to ensure that we are best placed to build successfully on the first year of operation.
12. The strength of the Responsibility Deal lies in the diversity of organisations that it brings together – public sector, commercial, non-governmental, and academic – in a collaborative approach, and this is something that we want to build on. However we have become increasingly aware of a small number of issues where we could improve:
 - utilisation of additional expertise/ experience outside of existing HLSG members
 - wider Food Network members feel less engaged than they could be
 - the work programme can be seen as ‘top down’ by those not directly involved.
13. In response to these issues, the views of HLSG would be welcome on the following potential changes;
 - setting up time-limited working groups, reporting into HLSG. These could be structured around specific topics or technical aspects of new pledges, and/ or based on particular themes. Candidates would

include technical sub-groups on salt and saturated fat, or perhaps a group on building engagement

- building on the positive feedback from the wider Food Network events held on 21 February, regular (at least annual, better half-yearly) engagement events open to all partners and potential partners to update on progress and drive implementation
- regularly reviewing the membership of HLSG itself with a view to ensuring the right experience/ expertise is available to fit with the forward work programme at any particular time. This could also give other partners the opportunity to get involved in strategic issues.

14. Subject to views from HLSG on the above we will frame firm proposals.

HLSG Secretariat
Department of Health, May 2012