SALT STRATEGY BEYOND 2012

INTRODUCTION

1. Reducing salt consumption is an important factor in helping to tackle avoidable premature mortality from coronary heart disease and stroke, and is a priority of the Responsibility Deal Food Network. Over the last decade salt consumption has been declining steadily (15% overall) with around a half gram reduction between 2008-2011. Salt levels in many of our staple foods have reduced significantly, by 40-50% or more, and since 2007 more than 11 million kilograms of salt have been removed from foods covered by salt reduction targets. However, average salt consumption remains high at around 8.1g/day (2011), so there is a long way to go to meet the 6g population goal.

2. To maintain momentum on salt reduction the Food Network has developed a strategy for action beyond 2012. The High Level Steering Group of the Food Network agreed the details of the strategy in December 2012, which includes the following four themes:
   - reformulation;
   - further activity by the catering sector;
   - behaviour change; and
   - broadening sign up to salt reduction.

3. Details of activities under each of these work streams are outlined below, and the rationale and proposed timeline for this work is presented in the Annex. Also included in the Annex are route maps, which outline the different pledges that new and existing partners in different sectors can sign up to.

REFORMULATION FRAMEWORK

4. Three new reformulation pledges will be developed to complement the existing Responsibility Deal salt reduction pledges. These new pledges will provide targets for all sectors of the food industry - manufacturing, catering and retail – to work towards and will be developed in two phases as follows:

   - **Maximum per serving salt targets for caterers.** This will form the first phase of work and will involve development of a new pledge. This will set maximum salt targets for catering businesses on a per serving basis, for the most popular dishes sold. This is the first time caterers will be asked to meet targets based on the final served dish as it is eaten by the customer.

   - **Reviewing existing salt reduction targets.** The second phase of work will involve a review and recalibration, where appropriate, of all the 2012 salt targets, plus a new target for meat extracts (gravy, stock cubes, bouillon etc) which were not previously covered by the targets. These targets will form the basis of a new pledge which will include:

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1 These are: F2 Salt Reduction; F5 a-c Salt Catering Pledges.
2 Available at https://www.wp.dh.gov.uk/responsibilitydeal/files/2012/01/Salt-Targets-for-Responsibility-Deal.pdf
- a limited number of essential targets - which all businesses would be expected to work towards within a set timeframe; and
- business specific targets – covering the remaining salt targets - from which individual businesses would select specific priority categories to work on. Businesses will be asked to meet these targets within a set period, from the date they choose to sign up to the target, and would be encouraged to build on the number of targets they commit to meeting over time.

- Maximum salt levels for new products, applicable to all sectors\(^3\), will also be developed during the second phase of work and will form the basis of a separate pledge.

5. We aim to finalise work on the first phase (maximum per serving targets for caterers) in Spring 2013; and to finalise the development work on the second phase (reviewing existing salt reduction targets and maximum salt levels for new products) by the end of 2013. Details of the process and timeline for development of Phase 1 and 2 activities are provided in the Annex.

**FURTHER ACTIVITY BY THE CATERING SECTOR**

6. The Department of Health will work with stakeholders including the British Nutrition Foundation and the British Hospitality Association to help develop and make available suitable basic training course(s) focused on the hospitality sector, to raise awareness of the health implications of consuming too much salt, and what action can be taken to minimise the addition of salt to food. This will be aimed at chefs and available to all those working in the catering sector.

**BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

7. A pledge will be developed to enable organisations across all sectors to make commitments and demonstrate how they are contributing to consumer behaviour change to achieve a lower salt diet.

8. The pledge will be developed by June and will cover a broad range of activities to capture the diverse opportunities available to different partners. Examples of commitments might include promotion of lower salt products over their higher salt equivalents; specific incentives, e.g. price promotions/coupons etc, and disincentives e.g. the healthy option is provided as the default on a menu (consumers therefore have to specifically request less healthy alternatives); education and information directed at the consumer (including through Change4Life).

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\(^3\) Manufacturers, retailers and caterers.
BROADENING SIGN UP TO SALT REDUCTION

Partners new to salt reduction

9. Arrangements will also be put in place for Responsibility Deal partners who have yet to sign up to salt reduction, and for whom achieving the new targets, which will be developed in 2013 may prove too difficult in one step. For these businesses we will revise the current salt reduction pledge F2, to allow new partners to meet the 2012 targets within a specific timescale (e.g. 2-3 years from sign up), before they take the decision to move on to the reformulation pledges that will be developed in 2013.

10. The Department of Health will seek to broaden commitment to the Responsibility Deal salt reduction pledges by continuing to engage with and urge businesses across all sectors to sign up to the existing and new pledges. Additional steps are being taken to enable small and medium sized businesses to engage, including working with local partners and encouraging business to business mentoring.
ANNEX

Background & Rationale

11. The approach used to deliver early salt reductions, which involved the development of specific salt reduction targets for those categories of food which contribute the most salt to our diet, has proved highly successful and has been emulated worldwide. However as salt reduction progresses and becomes more challenging, a more holistic approach is needed to maintain momentum. The Responsibility Deal Food Network’s High Level Steering Group (HLSG) has therefore agreed a strategy beyond 2012 that encourages proportionate action across each of the different themes of the strategy, which takes account of both progress so far, and the scope for future action.

12. The proposals outlined above have been developed to deliver progress in the short, medium and long term. A brief outline of the rationale for the proposals under each theme of the strategy is outlined below.

Reformulation

13. Reformulation has been proven to be an effective strategy to reduce population intake of salt, but progress across the food industry has been mixed. The salt content of some foods remains high and the variation within some categories is marked. Scope for further action is known to vary depending upon the food sector, food product, technical and consumer acceptability issues, and available resources within businesses. To ensure continued momentum, reformulation action needs to be suitably challenging and wide-ranging and also allow sufficient flexibility to business in recognition of different starting points and technical challenges to maximise sign-up. The proposals outlined above were considered by HLSG to offer a credible approach that will maximise public health gains, and encourage the widest possible sign up from businesses.

Phase 1

14. Catering products tend to be saltier than their retail equivalents, so by developing new maximum targets, per serving, for the most popular dishes sold, the contribution to salt reduction and public health from this sector will be boosted; the new targets will complement the existing salt catering pledges (F5a-c).

Phase 2

15. In light of the issues outlined in paragraph 13 it was felt that only by reviewing all the current targets would it be possible to identify where the greatest scope for reformulation and public health gains will arise.

16. By identifying a mix of essential and business specific targets, reformulation will be encouraged across Responsibility Deal partners in the areas where each specific business can make the greatest contribution to public health improvements. It will also provide businesses with the flexibility to plan their wider reformulation programmes to suit their business model.
17. The new targets will be developed no later than the end of 2013 and this timeframe will afford current partners who have not yet met the 2012 targets until then to achieve them (before new targets are published). This will go some way to helping to develop a more even playing field and allow all partners to move forward together to the next stage of reformulation. But it does not preclude those businesses that are forging ahead, from taking the opportunity to go further, confident in the knowledge that this will contribute to the post 2012 salt reduction goals.

18. In light of comments received from stakeholders, maximum targets for new products will be developed concurrently with the review of the current sales weighted average and maximum targets. Targets for new products will help to deliver change in the salt levels in the market in the long-term. Consumers have different expectations about the taste profile of new products relative to existing products, giving an opportunity to encourage changes in consumers’ palates and promote a preference for significantly lower salt products.

Timetable for Action on Reformulation
19. The process of target development will involve a series of category specific stakeholder meetings to gather intelligence and discuss the scope for further reformulation. This information will then be used to set or recalibrate existing targets, as appropriate.

20. Not all stakeholders with an interest in target development will be able to attend these meetings, or necessarily be members of the trade associations or NGOs represented. To ensure they have the ability to inform/participate in the process, information will be sent to interested parties electronically, to enable them to submit their views.

21. The broad timescale for these meetings is as follows:
   - Phase 1 - March /April - maximum salt targets for catering businesses on a per serving basis, for the most popular dishes;
   - Phase 2 - May, July and September - recalibrate 2012 targets, set a new target for meat extracts and maximum targets for new products.

22. Further details of the dates and categories of foods considered at each meeting will be made available in due course. The aim is for HLSG to consider and agree targets for Phase 1 in June, and Phase 2 in December.

Best Practice
23. To help maximise the impact of the pledge DH will produce information on the kind of salt levels that have been achieved in different products and to which businesses can aspire. This information may be used to support businesses to focus their reformulation efforts in key areas in order to make credible commitments in support of the pledge; by trade associations to encourage best practice and promote wider reformulation efforts across the food industry; and by businesses as a guide to their suppliers.
**Further activity by the catering sector**

24. Chefs are often responsible for menu and recipe development, procurement of ingredients and seasoning of dishes during preparation, as such they are in a key position of influence. By promoting training, which raises awareness of the health implications of consuming too much salt, and what action can be taken to minimise the addition of salt to food, there is the potential to encourage behaviour change among those working in the catering sector, both professionally and at an individual level. Provision of suitable training course(s) should enable businesses to meet the training requirements of the salt catering pledge F5a, support action by businesses towards all the salt catering pledges (F5a-c) and has the potential to encourage wider sign up to this pledge among businesses of all sizes.

**Behaviour change**

25. Health is everyone’s business, and everyone can play a role in helping to reduce salt intakes. While reformulation has reduced salt consumption significantly (and appropriate consumer choices can amplify its effects) further progress to reach our 6g intake target will also require significant behaviour changes among consumers. This requires that people understand the health implications of consuming too much salt, are motivated to reduce their salt intakes and have the knowledge and skills to plan, buy and prepare a healthier diet, which is lower in salt and meets dietary recommendations. The Government has a role in promoting dietary advice and educating consumers about what constitutes a healthy balanced diet. ‘Be Food Smart’, which was launched in January 2013, takes the Government’s Change4Life social marketing campaign beyond obesity to raise awareness about individual nutrients, and provide advice to people on salt reduction. Information about the link between salt and health, recipes, and advice on how to use food labels (‘Watch the Salt’) provide people with the essential motivation and practical assistance they need to take the necessary steps to achieve a lower salt diet. The food industry and NGOs can play an important role in helping consumers and build on this activity, for example by promotion of public health messages, offering practical advice which enables sustained changes to diet, and by identifying and making lower salt foods widely available.

26. Development of a pledge on consumer behaviour will help to encourage these activities, and harness the opportunities to make progress faster.

**Broadening sign up to salt reduction**

27. As part of the Responsibility Deal forward work programme, action is being taken to broaden sign-up to the Responsibility Deal. DH engagement with larger businesses to promote sign up to the salt pledges will be prioritised initially to maximise both market coverage and public health gains. The provision of a new pledge, which offers new partners the option to meet the 2012 targets before moving onto further pledges on reformulation, will encourage sign up from businesses new to reformulation and help to create a more even playing field.

28. While the Deal has been successful in delivering progress primarily among big businesses, action on salt across the whole of the food industry, and businesses of
all sizes is needed if we are to maximise the benefit to public health. Small businesses are particularly important because of the large number of people they employ and serve, particularly through out of home food outlets and licensed premises.

29. As responsibility for public health moves to Local Authorities and Public Health England comes into existence, the Department of Health has considered how it can helpfully bring together resources and put in place a national framework that supports local activity on the range of actions, including salt reduction, covered by the Deal. The Department of Health is working with the Local Government Association, local authorities, local businesses, trade bodies and other organisations with local networks to develop a toolkit. This toolkit is designed to support local authorities and other organisations with local networks to engage with local business on the actions they might take to improve the health of their staff and customers.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

30. Transparency and businesses’ progress against these pledges will be demonstrated through the usual Responsibility Deal annual updates. The Department of Health will continue to monitor progress through the National Diet and Nutrition Survey and urinary sodium surveys, and evaluation of market data where available.
Route map for existing manufacturer and retailer partners pledging to reduce salt

Existing partner manufacturer or retailer

F2 - 2012 Targets

Currently working towards or have met 2012 targets

Essential targets
Meet all targets by specified end date

Business specific targets
Select target(s) to work on
Meet each target within eg 3yrs of sign up
Build number of targets over time

New Product Targets
Open to all businesses at any time

Consumer behaviour change pledge

Phase 2 salt targets

F2 refers to Responsibility Deal pledge for salt. Businesses can sign up to any number of pledges.
New partner manufacturer or retailer

Initial sign up

- Consumer behaviour change pledge
- 2012 Targets: Meet 2012 salt targets within 2-3 yrs of sign up
- New Product Targets: Open to all businesses at any time

Essential targets
- Meet all targets by specified end date

Business specific targets
- Select target(s) to work on
- Meet each target within 3 yrs of sign up
- Build number of targets over time

Phase 2 salt targets

Businesses can sign up to any number of pledges
Route map for new and existing catering partners pledging to reduce salt

New / existing partner caterer

- F5a
  - Training and kitchen practice

- F5b
  - Reformulation

- F5c
  - Procurement - Meet 50% of 2012 salt targets and build year on year

Consumer behaviour change pledge

- Maximum per serving targets for popular dishes

New Product Targets

- Open to all businesses at any time

2012 Targets

- Meet 2012 salt targets within 2-3 yrs of sign up

Business specific targets

- Select target(s) to work on
- Meet each target within 3yrs of sign up. Build number of targets over time.

Essential targets

- Meet all targets by specified end date

F5 a,b,c refer to Responsibility Deal pledges for salt. Businesses can sign up to any number of pledges.