



Food Drink Ireland Opening Statement to Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

11 July 2018

Prepared Consumer Foods (PCF) is the Food Drink Ireland (FDI) Directorate within Ibec which represents companies producing value-added food and beverages selling in Ireland or internationally to grocery, convenience retail, food service and other food companies, and companies bringing value-added food and beverages into Ireland for sale in this market.

That we face a serious challenge in tackling childhood obesity in Ireland is unquestionable. As an industry, we recognise our responsibility to play a part in meeting the challenge and are determined to do so.

We recognise the same determination in other stakeholders and in this Committee and, given the obvious need for legislators, regulators, stakeholders and industry to work together, we are grateful for the invitation to speak with you today.

Our determination to do SOMETHING in relation to childhood obesity must not, however dilute our commitment to do the RIGHT things.

We must ensure we follow evidence rather than emotion. In a Healthy Weight for Ireland, the Department of Health's Obesity Policy and Action Plan, we have a roadmap to reduce obesity across the Irish population. Step 3 is for Government to "secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention" and we are ready, willing and able collaborators.

To inform an evidence-based discussion, I refer the Committee to the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) paper "Overcoming obesity: an initial economic analysis".

MGI studied 74 interventions to address obesity in 18 areas that are being discussed or piloted around the world. It conducted a meta-analysis of research available. Of the 74 interventions, MGI were able to gather sufficient evidence to estimate what might be the potential cost and impact of 44 interventions. On the basis of this analysis, MGI has developed a perspective on what it might take to start to reverse rising obesity prevalence in a developed market. It found the interventions that had the highest level of impact across total population were portion control and reformulation.

FDI recognises the importance of portion size and the key role it plays in achieving a balanced diet.

Portion size is not just a matter of personal responsibility for people deciding how much food to put on their dinner plates. It is also for industry to be aware of the quantities of product in packages designed to be consumed as one portion.

Food and drink companies have been amending package size to positively impact on dietary intake. This is particularly the case with products which are commonly consumed "on-the-go" such as snacks, confectionery, ice-cream and beverages.

FDI is currently in the process of capturing industry's efforts for the first time. This report will be published at the end of 2018.

In relation to reformulation (or to put it simply, the changing of recipes), in 2016, the Irish food industry became the first in the world to publish exact details of the impact of reformulation on the dietary intake of a nation. The FDI/Creme Global Reformulation Report was launched by then Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar, TD, and proved conclusively the positive impact industry efforts have had on consumption. (An infographic on results of this research is provided and copies of the full report will be given to the Clerk of the Committee for distribution to Members.)

It showed that during the seven years (2005 – 2012) covered by the research:

- * Salt content of the products analysed reduced by 37%;
- * Sugar content fell by 14%;
- * The amount of energy as measured in calories sold over the seven years to 2012 reduced by 12%;
- * Both total fat and saturated fat intake reduced by approximately 10%

Beverage companies alone took 10 billion calories out of the annual Irish diet between 2005 and 2012. 10 percent of all sugar contributed to the Irish diet by soft drinks was also reduced in these seven years.

This was achieved through voluntary action years ahead of the Department of Health's call to work with industry on a roadmap for reformulation targets. Industry has dynamically reduced fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar content through voluntary innovation alone. For example, a salt reduction programme was run over ten years in conjunction with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland which slowly but surely led to dramatically reduced salt levels across a wide range of product categories.

Phase two of the FDI reformulation project is underway and results of the further positive work undertaken by FDI members will be published in late 2018.

PCF also recognises the importance of responsible marketing practices

In October 2015, and per Action 3.2 of a Health Weight for Ireland, the then Minister for Health Leo Varadkar announced the appointment of Professor Alan Reilly to chair a working group to develop a code of practice for food marketing, promotion and sponsorship.

The working group included representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Food Drink Ireland, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the Association of Advertisers in Ireland, the Institute of Advertisers in Ireland, the Food Safety Promotion Board (Safefood), Healthy Food For All, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, the HSE and the Department of Health. 4

On the 14 February 2018 Minister of State for Health Promotion, Catherine Byrne, TD, launched the voluntary Codes. The purpose of the Codes, which have been agreed with the food industry, is to ensure that foods high in fat, salt and sugar are marketed in a responsible way. In particular the Codes seek to ensure that children are not exposed to inappropriate marketing, advertising or sponsorship associated with these kinds of food and drink products, and that healthier food choices are actively promoted.

FDI welcomed the publication by Minister Catherine Byrne. Food and beverage companies are committed to responsible marketing.

The focus now must be on effective implementation. FDI has called on the Minister to quickly bring together the key participants to develop the promised technical guidance document which advertisers, rights owners, media outlets and advertising practitioners now need to bring the Voluntary Codes of Practice to life.

It is also important to note that these codes sit alongside and complement existing voluntary and statutory measures with which industry complies, to ensure the responsible marketing of food to the public. These include the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) General Children's Commercial Communications Code, the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) Code of Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications in Ireland, the World Federation of Advertisers' EU Pledge and companies' own internal codes of conduct.

Any single intervention is likely to have only a small overall impact on its own. FDI welcomes the Government's whole of school approach in 'A Healthy Weight for Ireland Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025'. However, government could be investing in measures such as Home Economics classes, school sports clubs, access to green spaces and better infrastructure to allow for cycling and walking to and from school.

We applaud the Committees determination to tackle childhood obesity and share your commitment. We believe that broad collaboration between all stakeholders is necessary to effectively address the issue. The food and drink industry will remain fully dedicated to identifying and pursuing initiatives which will positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of all people in Ireland. We will continue to seek credible evidence to identify effective interventions and will be unstinting in their application. We recognise the important role we can play in addressing the issue and will not be found wanting in our dedication to play it.