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Checked Against Delivery

When I was told last week that I would be sharing this platform with John Humphrys my heart skipped several beats.

My anxiety came **not** from a worry that I would be savaged by one of the more trenchant critics of the food industry: after all there is not much I can do about that - he's smarter than me.

My real concerns centre on how he's going to assess my use of the English language. Because although Mr. Humphrys deserves great praise for the vital constitutional role he has played since 1997 as Her Majesty's official opposition, his most enduring contribution to British society has, in my view, been his valiant efforts to stop our language being misused and corrupted.

His book "Lost for Words" is essential reading for anyone trying to communicate ideas clearly and concisely. In order to meet his high standards I have had every comma and colon in this speech vetted by Lyn Truss. And I've had it combed for cliché and jargon.

So, working within these tight linguistic and grammatical constraints I propose in the next 12 minutes to examine the progress which the food industry has made since the government published its White Paper in the Autumn of 2004.

As it relates to nutrition and health the White Paper is in my view:

- sensible, thoughtful and pragmatic
- it addresses all of the key issues – labelling, advertising to children, public education, physical activity, and

- the task now is to identify solutions that get to the heart of these problems, without getting distracted by some of the politics and emotion surrounding them.

Because it is clear that our bad eating habits are resulting in many more of us getting **too few** essential nutrients and many more of us taking in **too many** calories. As a nation we are getting fat and unfit and are consuming almost twice the amount of salt that we should. Doing none of us any good.

Why has this come about? Well it is largely an outcome of the success of our own industry.

- Massive improvements in farming, manufacturing and retailing mean food is now more plentiful, more available and cheaper than at any time in human history. The temptation to over consume is great.
- Despite this if you track consumption data back to the end of the war, the British, as a nation, are NOT taking in as many calories in 2005 as they did in 1945. The really big difference between now and then is that we are expending far fewer calories.
- Why this should be so is obvious. In the 1950's and 60's our lifestyles were much more active. Back then:
 - people walked to work or school;
 - manual labourers outnumbered office workers;
 - T.V. was for the privileged few;
 - car ownership was low, and
 - hopscotch and street soccer (rather than Tomb Raider) were the children's games of choice.

So let us not forget this (and to its credit the White Paper does not) but there are two sides to the the obesity equation – diet and physical activity. As an industry our duty is to address the diet side of the equation, whilst at the same time gently prompting government to tackle the problem of our dangerously inactive lifestyles.

So what has the industry done in the eighteen months since the White Paper?

A great deal, I would argue, and under a number of headings

- **On Labelling** we have built a consensus that we should all move to marking G.D.A's – Guideline Daily Amounts – on our products.
- Most of us have done this on the backs of our packs, and a growing number plan to put a simplified version on the front.
- **On Salt** we have worked closely with the FSA to produce large reductions across the whole range of processed foods
 - In Bread it is down by almost a third since the early 1990's.
 - Breakfast Cereals down 22% over the past three years.
 - Soups and jarred meal sauces reduced by around 30% in 3 years.
 - There are similar stories to tell in snack products, crisps, biscuits and cakes.
- **On fat** there have been extensive efforts to minimise or eliminate trans fats from our products and to reduce saturated fats.
- **On Portion** sizes there have been initiatives from the fast food industry and we have seen Confectioners withdrawing king size products

Significant and measurable progress has been made.

What remains to be done?

There is unfinished business in four main areas

- front of pack labelling
- advertising to children
- food in schools, and
- public education

Let's start with Labelling

- Last week the FSA recommended a new scheme based on multiple traffic lights. They want our packs to display 4 nutrients (saturated fat, fat, sugar and salt) and also total calories. We are happy to do this.

- The F.S.A scheme is, in essence, **very** close to the one being used by Tesco and the one which will be adopted by most of the major food manufacturers.
- There is one important difference. The FSA would like us to colour code the nutrients – red, amber or green – according to their level in the product. Their reasons for insisting on this are based on market research which suggests that consumers want a simple, “at a glance” mechanism for choosing. They also believe that low income, poorly educated consumers will be confused by the percentage G.D.A’s which we - the manufacturers - plan to use. These are serious concerns which we should take seriously.
- However it is important too that people understand why we take a different view from the FSA – particularly since in last week’s public spat over this issue our arguments (and I know this will shock you) were not correctly reported by the media.
- My worry about traffic lights is that they will drive the wrong consumer behaviours. Let me illustrate this with some examples.
 - Take a man shopping for butter or margarine. Standing in front of the chiller cabinet he will see full fat butter with 54% saturated fat, that’s bad fat, next to it will be a low fat margarine with just 12% saturated fat – under the FSA scheme both will carry a red traffic light for saturated fat. The consumer not surprisingly will conclude that there is no difference between them. His G.P. would tell him otherwise.
 - Another example is mayonnaise. A woman shopping for mayonnaise will, of course, naturally choose Hellmanns. Here she will be confronted with a choice – Hellmanns Original (with 80% fat) and Hellmanns Light which has only 30% fat. Again the FSA scheme will give both a red light for total fat.
 - This can’t be right. I’m all for simplicity and I badly want a scheme which a single mother in Sunderland can understand but I do have serious concerns about one which has been simplified to such an extent that it will lead her to make worse, not better, choices.

In the end of course both the FSA and the Food Industry have the same goal in mind – the provision of clear information to the consumer.

If we are intellectually honest we should be “evidence led”. My proposal is we allow the different schemes to go ahead and then evaluate them in two years time. At that point, on the basis of fact, we should move **not** to the one that is preferred by consumers, but the one that is driving the right behaviour.

A second area of unfinished business is Advertising to Children

- Here there is a difference of opinion
- Advertising to children - whether it's toys, food or leisure products - is an emotional issue. And with food there are clearly strong societal and political pressures for change.
- The Food industry recognises these and has put forward a range of proposals to OFCOM
- Again these are not well understood. It is important to be clear what our offer is:
 - **First:** to accept a voluntary ban on advertising any food products to children under six.
 - **Second:** to accept rationing on the amount of food advertising in peak children's viewing hours.
 - **And third:** to tighten the self regulatory codes governing areas such as the use of celebrities and cartoon characters.
- Paradoxically the government's approach is based on a narrower targeting. They actually only want to restrict the advertising of foods high in sugar, fat and salt. The problem with this approach is that it obliges them to develop a model – based on nutritional profiling – that will allow them to identify such foodstuffs.
- The model that the FSA (on the government's behalf) have come up with is, we believe, subjective.
- If OFCOM are forced to accept this model it could prove to be an embarrassment. Why not instead, give serious consideration to the Food Industry's, simpler, more broad based initiatives?

The third area of unfinished business is Food in Schools

- Here it is unquestionably right for Government to intervene. **Right** because it is important to instil good nutritional habits at an early age. **Right** because as the provider of these meals government has a duty to specify the nutritional standards

that they wish to provide to the children under their care. As suppliers we will meet the specifications prescribed for us.

- My only advice to the DFES is to be pragmatic in introducing this policy. Children will vote with their feet if we go back to serving them braised liver and boiled cabbage. We already know that, in the Borough of Greenwich where Jamie Oliver did such brilliant work, the take up of school meals has fallen. You can't go faster than your consumer is willing to tolerate.
- Beyond the food served in school canteens, the area of most interest to our industry is vending and tuck shops. This is not because it is either large or profitable. In fact it is neither. We are interested because draconian action here will bring all kinds of unintended consequences. If carbonated drinks, chocolate and crisps are banned from school premises a black market will develop overnight. The smuggling trade will be rampant and cause all kinds of problems for teachers, parents and children. Think prohibition in 1920's America.
- My advice is don't underestimate the ingenuity of the average school boy. Before you know where we are the Daily Mail will be running front page profiles of the Al Capones of the play ground who are out there peddling contraband Kit Kats – once again a well intentioned policy will be ridiculed. And who will take the rap, yep, you've guessed – it will be Cadbury, it will be Walkers and it will be Coke.

This segues neatly into the final area of unfinished business - Public Education.

- With food so cheap, so plentiful and so tempting the only way to address poor nutrition and obesity in an enduring fashion is with education. People (and particularly children) need to understand the consequences of the every day choices that they make in terms of diet and exercise (Do I have that pudding? Do I play on the computer or go out and kick a ball around?)
- To create this level of understanding will require a major programme of public education sustained over a long period of time.
- Our vision for this is:
 - a. a joint government/industry campaign designed to raise awareness of diet and exercise.
 - b. It would focus on the need for **balance** – balance in terms of what we eat and balance in terms of the lifestyles we lead.

- The campaign would be jointly funded and would be genuinely multi-media. Aside from mainstream channels like T.V, Press and posters the messages could appear on:
 - Billions of food packs
 - Millions of leaflets in supermarkets
 - These same leaflets could be tailored for use in schools, doctors surgeries, mother and baby clinics, leisure centres etc.
 - Messages could also be distributed by the government inside the billions of envelopes that are sent out each year by institutions such as the Benefits Agency, the Child Support Agency etc.

- All of this material could provide links to company, brand and government web sites where consumers could find much more information if they wanted it.

- This is an ambitious plan and it represents a major commitment on behalf of the industry. It is an idea that we have been discussing in Whitehall for nearly two years. As yet, however, we've not been able to make progress with it.

- Faced with this we have decided instead to develop a programme of awareness building for G.D.A. labelling. In doing so we will try and address some of the concerns raised by the F.S.A. and take the first step towards what we hope is a broad based and long lasting public health campaign.

- I want to emphasise however that our commitment to the Department of Health remains. The White Paper calls for a programme of Public Education. The industry remains eager to work with you on this. We have funds, communications skills and media (in the form of billions of packs) to offer. We think you would be foolish to turn us down.

- So let's take stock.

- **Since the publication of the White Paper the food industry has made good progress** towards improving the nutritional profile of its products. It is also

providing clearer information to consumers, so that they can make the right choices for themselves and their families. We are also addressing meaningfully issues of portion sizes and vending in schools.

- **What still needs to be done?:**

- We still need to agree on ONE approach to front of pack labelling.
- We still need to satisfy people's worries about advertising to children. We hope that Ofcom will find a solution here that is pragmatic and proportionate.
- We need to improve the quality of food in schools. The government must lead on this. But outlawing chocolate, crisps and soft drinks will not get them far. The Roosevelt administration had to abolish the Volstead Act in 1933 after criminalising a generation of Americans.
- Finally we need to develop a joint government/industry programme of public education. If this programme is based around guide line daily amounts (as it could be) we look forward to other participants in the obesity debate making positive gestures. The BBC for example could advertise Guideline Daily Amounts for television viewing – no more than two hours a day. They could even colour code their schedules – red for Paxman and Kirsty Wark, green for Attenborough and Grandstand.

But really the only way in which this can be done is by government and industry working effectively together. The issues of diet and health which we confront are too complex, too multi-dimensional for either of us to solve on our own. Like it or not, we are condemned to work together in the interests of that pesky individual who we call consumers and you in government call citizens

In this endeavour we are about to lose one important player. Jon Bell – the Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency – he retires at the end of month. In my view, he will be a loss both to the agency to the Food industry. Although we have had our disagreements, Jon for me epitomised everything you could ask for in a public

servant – intelligence, integrity and a genuine desire to do the right thing. You will be missed John and we wish you well.

In concluding I would like to make a plea for a sense of balance and perspective in the way in which food is discussed and reported. Someone arriving from outer space and reading the Guardian newspaper would get the impression that we are a generation which demands qualities of our low fat yoghurts that we once expected of our saints. Like all really good things in life – claret, sex, Shakespeare - food is something that has to be consumed with thought and moderation.