

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE FRINGE EVENT 2006

WHO RUNS UK PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY: POLITICIANS OR BIG BUSINESS Melanie Leech, Director General, Food and Drink Federation

- Thank you very much to the British Heart Foundation and Diabetes UK for inviting me to this event. I am very pleased to be here and to be sharing a platform with such distinguished company.
- Just to explain first who I am and who I represent. FDF is the voice of the UK food and drink manufacturing industry. Food and drink is the single largest manufacturing sector in the UK. It is an industry of huge importance to the economy with a turnover of £70 billion and a workforce of some 500 000 people. It contains some of the country's best known and loved brand names.
- FDF helps our manufacturers operate in an appropriately regulated marketplace to maximise their competitiveness. My job – and FDF's – is to communicate our industry's values and concerns to a range of audiences in the UK and abroad, including Government, regulators, politicians, consumers and the media. We work in partnership with other main players in the food chain to help ensure our food is safe and that consumers can have confidence in it.
- Today, the question on the table is 'who runs public health policy: politicians or big business'. But the real issue is actually, with respect to the sponsors of this event, not 'who runs policy' but 'who delivers the outcomes which the policy is designed to bring about' and to that question the answer is surely that we all have a role to play.
- I'd like in my brief slot to talk about the role of industry.
- The food and drink industry is committed to helping consumers achieve a healthy lifestyle. You don't have to take my word for it – there is plenty of evidence of our commitment.
- In 2004 industry launched its Food and Health Manifesto, which sets out seven key pledges on how it could play its part on the issue. These cover reformulation (reducing salt; providing a range of product choices for fat and sugar); portion sizes; labelling; vending in schools; advertising to children; public education. Industry also committed itself to being an exemplar for promoting healthy living within its own workforce.
- In September 2005 the industry was able to publish detailed results of the progress made. Based on a survey of 20 leading food companies, the 'Delivering on Our Commitments' report assessed the extent to which they have delivered on their Manifesto commitments. For example:

Products

- Companies have made great strides on reformulating their products. By the end of 2005, compared with 2004:
 - products worth £7.4bn had a lower level of salt
 - products worth £2.2bn had a lower level of fat
 - products worth £1.4bn had a lower level of sugar.
- A large number of food manufacturers have virtually eliminated trans fats from their products.

Labelling

- Industry is committed to Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) as the most powerful way of enabling consumers to become more informed about their food intake. £15bn worth of products will have full GDA information on food packaging by the end of this year, and an increasing number of manufacturers are now rolling out GDA-based signpost labels on the front of pack. GDA labels provide consumers with essential nutritional information in context to make quick choices about the food they eat.
- There is a large measure of agreement between industry and the FSA on the key elements of a front of pack labelling scheme:
 - separate information on fat, saturated fat, total sugars and salt
 - information on nutrients per portion, and
 - agreed nutritional criteria.
- Where we differ is on the use of ‘traffic lights’. The GDA labelling scheme does not colour code nutrients red, amber and green, instead it tells individuals what percentage of their GDA each nutrient comprises to enable them to build an informed picture of what they are eating. Most manufacturing companies have chosen to use numbers instead of colours because they believe it is a more accurate way for consumers to tell if a product contains a higher or lower amount of a particular nutrient.
- I know this is seen as a contentious issue. There are I think two things to say – first, we have already travelled a long way– three or four years ago front of pack labelling was not even on the agenda. Second, in reality the jury is still out – what matters is not which scheme looks the best or what people say they like. Rather it’s whether the different schemes coming into the market play a part in changing people’s behaviour in real life, in the purchasing decisions they make.
- We are committed to working with the FSA and others on a joint research project to assess the impact of the different labelling schemes in the marketplace as they progressively roll out and welcome that constructive approach to tackling the real issue for all of us – finding out what works for consumers in practice.

Advertising to Children

- Obesity is a big issue and advertising is one small part of the jigsaw. We do accept that there should be new restrictions on advertising to young children, that’s why we have responded to Ofcom’s consultation with industry proposals for strict new rules on what younger children see on TV.
- Our proposals will deliver probably the toughest set of Code content rules in the world, incorporating a new section of the BCAP Code specifically relating to food and

drink advertising to children and including tougher new provisions on supporting healthy diets and lifestyles; promotional offers; use of characters and celebrities, and accuracy in food advertising.

- They would:
 - See the complete withdrawal of food and drink advertising on main general entertainment channels - such as ITV1, Channel 4, Five and Sky One - during times at which programmes specifically made for children under 10 are broadcast
 - Place a limit of 30 seconds of food and drink advertising per hour on dedicated children's channels

- And so deliver a 50% reduction in commercial impacts on a 2003 base year (Tessa Jowell's challenge - Nov 2003) with regard to the Government's prime target of pre- and primary-school children.

- It is worth noting incidentally, that the total number of times any core category ad was seen by children aged between 4-15 has declined by 28% since 1999, and food alone has decreased by 32%. Those are not industry figures – they come from OFCOM 2004.

- But to come back to the question, who delivers the outcomes that public policy is trying to drive? Ultimately they are owned by all of us - individuals taking responsibility for making informed choices about their diet and lifestyle. In this respect, industry has two very key contributions to make – our last two Manifesto pledges.

Industry as exemplar

- As I said earlier, we have around 500,000 employees and most of them have families, So the sector has a huge opportunity to influence and support individuals towards healthier lifestyles. Many companies have well established workplace schemes in place – Kellogg's here in Manchester is just one example offering free confidential health and lifestyle assessments, backed up by action where necessary, and a range of measures to encourage physical activity and a balanced diet in the workplace and to remove barriers where they exist.
- We can and will do more across the sector as a whole and operating in this way, through our workforce, provides a fantastic way of reaching a significant group of individuals and families.

Public Education

- The only lasting solution to the challenge of obesity is education. Individuals need to be supported to:
 - know their food
 - know the limits on what they should eat
 - understand the calories in/calories out balance and the need for an active, healthy lifestyle

- People need to understand the consequences of the every day choices that they make in terms of diet and exercise. They also need to feel in control, empowered to make choices and to know that even a small change can make a big difference to their lives and that of their loved ones.

- To create this level of understanding and awareness will require a major programme of public education sustained over a long period of time. We think that the Government has created exactly the right framework for that through the 'Small Change, Big Difference' campaign.
- This initiative provides an opportunity for a new kind of partnership between government and industry for the public health agenda. It could include the type of joint government/industry programme of public information, which many of you may know has been a vision of the food industry for some time. But it would be much broader – where all of us have a role in working together to help people to make healthy choices – for us in industry integrated with delivering our own business strategies.
- Making that partnership a reality should help to deliver on the shared goals I believe we all have for public health in this country. And that's the real challenge. But for the record my answer to the exam question as set is that it is the Government which runs public health policy. Industry has always said that it is the legitimate role of Government to set the public policy framework, and to create the right conditions in which policy objectives can be delivered.