

March 2009



TheVoice

FDF: Speaking for the food and drink manufacturing industry

Manufacturing is critical to the success of the UK's food chain

The Food and Drink Federation welcomes Parliament's renewed interest in the vital debates about food security that are now raging. We were pleased to be asked to give evidence to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee as part of its ongoing inquiry into food supplies to 2050.

However, as the political debate intensifies, we are keen to remind Parliamentarians that our sector is the key link in the UK food chain.

Not only do food and drink manufacturers buy two-thirds of what British farmers produce, our sector is the biggest component of UK manufacturing. We account for 7,000 enterprises directly employing around 440,000 people and indirectly accounting for 1.2 million jobs elsewhere in the food chain.

FDF members feel strongly that the Government should do more to recognise the strategic importance of a thriving food sector to the success of the UK economy. There is a growing recognition that we need to rebalance the UK economy, reducing our dependency on the service sector. We believe food and drink manufacturing should be seen as critical to the success of the UK's future economic strategy.

Country of origin rising up the agenda

In our conversations with Parliamentarians in recent months, country of origin labelling has cropped up as a key discussion point – reflecting the wider debates now happening in the House. We completely agree that labelling should not mislead consumers and many commentators have rightly picked up on particular consumer concerns about the origin of the fresh meat they are buying in supermarkets.

But we also believe strongly this is not the same as assuming we need to label every complex product such as pies, pizzas and lasagnes which are cooked using a number of ingredients, sourced from a range of suppliers. In this instance, most consumers don't expect country of origin labelling, unless its absence would mislead them.

Saturated fat: how FDF members are already responding

While the Food Standards Agency recently launched a saturated fat awareness campaign, FDF members have been actively looking at how they can help consumers lower their intakes of saturated fat for many years.

New data from independent market researchers TNS Worldpanel shows there have been real changes in consumer purchasing behaviour in some key categories. And one of the key drivers for this change has been the reformulation efforts of food companies.

But changing the recipes of much-loved British brands so that they are lower in saturated fat is a complex task, as it needs to be done in a way that does not impact functionality, quality or price.

Our members have been rising to this particular challenge and are now leading the world when it comes to the reformulation of popular products – meeting consumer concerns about health in a way that doesn't compromise on taste.

www.fdf.org.uk

If you want information about anything in this newsletter, please call Kate Turner 020 7420 7129

Food and Drink Federation 

Making a real difference

Industry to gather on 28 April for the annual FDF dinner

Senior executives from the food industry, Parliamentarians, media and other key stakeholders will be gathering for the annual FDF President's Dinner at the Dorchester Hotel in London on 28 April.

We are delighted that this year's guest speaker is Professor John Beddington, Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of the Government Office for Science.

Our new President, Ross Warburton, will use his address to look beyond the current financial turbulence to call on Government and others to recognise the strategic importance of the food sector to the future success of the UK economy.

Another date for your diaries: on the afternoon of 08 July FDF is holding its annual Parliamentary Reception in the House of Commons.

The event is kindly sponsored by Paddy Tipping MP.

How FDF works for its members

The Food and Drink Federation speaks on behalf of one of the most important manufacturing sectors in the country, directly employing almost 440,000 people.

In promoting and protecting the interests of our members, FDF is focusing on the issues that matter most to their businesses and to the consumers our industry serves:

- Food Safety and Science
- Health and Wellbeing
- Sustainability and Competitiveness

Our front cover picture shows Fraser Hogg, Technical Director of member company Macphie of Glenberrie talking to colleagues

Labelling takes centre stage at FDF's debate in Brussels

Almost 100 industry executives and key stakeholders from the European Parliament, Council and Commission attended an FDF dinner-debate in Brussels last month.

With a proposed EU Labelling Regulation now being negotiated in Brussels, the debate focused on the topical question: 'Labelling: an effective tool to improve the food literacy of EU consumers?'

Chaired by Kate Trollope, editor of EU Food Law, the debate featured contributions from a highly distinguished panel comprising: Dr Renate Sommer MEP, the European Parliament's rapporteur for the proposed EU Labelling Regulation; Professor Klaus Grunert of Aarhus University, who recently conducted a pan-European consumer study into attitudes to labelling; Simon Stannard from the UK's permanent presentation to the EU; Melanie Leech, FDF's Director General; and Basil Mathioudakis, head of unit at DG Sanco in the European Commission.



Top: A distinguished panel of EU decision makers debated the labelling issue. Bottom: EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou gave the keynote address

Ross Warburton, President of FDF, said: "We are proud of the fact that for more than a decade UK industry has been leading the way by providing clearer nutritional information on back-of-pack on a voluntary basis. In recent years UK manufacturers have also been putting that information on the front of our products in the form of Guideline Daily Amount labelling."

The debate was followed by dinner, at which EU Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou, gave the keynote address.

Trans fats: not an issue for UK shoppers

Concerns about the use of trans fats in foods have risen back up the agenda in the European Parliament, with the Commission recently being urged by MEPs to treat this issue more seriously, and perhaps consider the need for a European ban.

But this is not a concern for UK consumers. The Food Standards Agency reviewed the health impacts of trans fats in 2007 and found that consumption was well below the recommended daily intake of 2% of energy, thanks to the voluntary reformulation efforts of industry.

Our members have long been committed to reducing trans fats – and have been changing recipes of favourite brands in a way that does not lead to increases in the saturated fat levels of foods (another key health concern in the UK, as our story on page one demonstrates). The progress made in the UK shows what can be achieved, without the need for regulation.

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