



International Sugar Organization

1 Canada Square
Canary Wharf
London E14 5AA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Press Release(17)14
(English only)**

29 March 2017

Article from The Times – 22 March 2017

“Food giants reject lower sugar target”

The Executive Director would like to draw your attention to the attached article from The Times on 22 March 2017 regarding food giants’ rejection of lower sugar targets.

Food giants reject lower sugar target

Chris Smyth Health Editor

The food industry will fail to hit a government goal to cut sugar by a fifth by 2020 and is to push for an alternative to "arbitrary" targets.

A representative of leading brands including Mars, Cadbury, Kellogg's and Nestlé told *The Times* that they would reduce sugar content in food and drink but not to the government's timescale.

The admission prompted anger from campaigners, who also accused Theresa May of failing to bring in tougher, binding measures to fight obesity. A voluntary challenge to companies to cut sugar by 20 per cent was one of the few measures to survive after the prime minister ditched most of a blueprint for tackling child obesity last summer.

Jeremy Hunt, the health secretary, told food companies in September that

"doing nothing was not an option". Public Health England has demanded "uniform and comprehensive" action on nine food categories, including a 5 per cent sugar cut this year. Next week it will detail targets for biscuits, cakes, puddings, cereals, chocolates, sweets, yoghurts, spreads and ice cream.

Tim Rycroft, of the Food and Drink Federation, which represents big

Continued on page 2, col 3

Sugar target

brands, said that a 20 per cent sugar cut "won't be technically possible or acceptable to UK consumers", adding: "It's very unlikely that all categories and all companies will achieve 20 per cent by 2020 and that will be true of the first year as well."

Companies can hit the target — a 20 per cent cut in the nine sugary categories by 2020 compared with 2015 — by reducing the amount of sugar per 100g, making portions smaller or shifting consumers to healthier alternatives. The targets do not apply to soft drinks, which are subject to a binding sugar tax.

A third of children are too fat, with obesity increasing the risk of early death. In a message to the government, Mr Rycroft told *The Times*: "My advice is to tone down the 20 per cent by 2020 stuff and talk about it in terms of a continuous journey. It's more about the direction of travel and momentum rather than setting arbitrary targets."

He agreed that "more needs to be done and that we are all eating too much sugar" but argued that brands were already cutting down in response to customer demand.

The industry would be better disposed towards overall calorie reduction targets that Public Health England will set later this year, Mr Rycroft signalled. "One of our frustrations is that the debate [is] skewed to sugar and the role of other nutrients in the diet has been overlooked," he said.

He also insisted it would be counter-

Analysis

If, come 2020, the food industry has cut sugar but failed to hit the target, the government has two choices (Chris Smyth writes). It could congratulate companies on a good effort and encourage them to carry on. Or it could say "not good enough" and threaten legislation.

Although the sugar reduction programme is nominally overseen by Public Health England, there is no doubt that this will be a political choice.

After the scrapping

of planned curbs on advertising and promotion, sugar reduction and the soft drinks levy are the only real weapons at

productive to name and shame companies that did not hit the targets. He said that a salt reduction programme, which has cut levels by about a third over a decade, had worked because consumers' tastes had been gradually altered without them "being aware".

Graham MacGregor, of the campaign group Action on Sugar, accused the Food and Drink Federation of sticking their heads in the sand. "With the salt reduction programme they said exactly the same thing — 'We can't do it,'

Tax avoidance

- Nestlé to cut sugar in sweets by 10 per cent.
- Sainsburys to cut it in cereals by 13 per cent.
- Tesco is cutting it in soft drinks by 20 per cent.
- Lucozade and Ribena to cut by half.

of planned curbs on advertising and promotion, sugar reduction and the soft drinks levy are the only real weapons at

the government's disposal to fight child obesity. However, the food industry calculates — probably rightly — that there is no political appetite for tough action this parliament and would rather move at its own pace than risk alienating consumers, who value flavour.

Theresa May's team has much less time for "nanny state" interventions than David Cameron and is convinced of the economic importance of food and drink, which is Britain's largest manufacturing sector with turnover of £82 billion a year.

"There's no point. It wasn't hard and it was done," he said. It was a "tragedy" that Mrs May had not done more on sugar. "On the steps of Downing Street she said she would look after the poor and the sick."

Alison Tedstone, the chief nutritionist at Public Health England, said: "We're pleased with how industry has engaged with the programme so far, but the real test will be what action it takes to reduce the nation's sugar consumption." Leading article, page 27

Sweet Nothings

If food manufacturers will not agree to cut sugar, the government must make them

The government's obesity strategy published in August last year was a capitulation. Under David Cameron, there had been talk of robust regulation and tax incentives to tackle the obesity epidemic that costs Britain thousands of lives every year. Theresa May, on entering Downing Street, bent to the whim of food industry lobbyists and set them mere voluntary targets. Today *The Times* reports that manufacturers are set to miss even those. Mrs May's attempt at a light-touch obesity strategy has failed. Her government needs to rediscover its backbone and regulate.

The United Nations has called Britain the "fat man of Europe", and with good reason. Two thirds of Britons are overweight or obese. Lack of exercise is partly to blame, but the real villain of the story is the consumption of unhealthy food. British consumers eat about double the recommended intake of sugar. Public Health England estimates that 4,700 lives and £576 million a year could be saved if they kicked this habit. Children's teeth are being ruined too. The number of tooth extractions taking place in hospital for those under four has risen by a quarter in the past decade.

The 2016 obesity strategy was meant to reverse this trend, but the prime minister chose not to pick a fight with the food and drink industry. Some suspect she was keen to shake off any policy initiatives closely associated with the previous government.

Her own approach to the problem consisted of fine words but few changes to the law. The government implemented the tax on sugary drinks that had been devised already. Mrs May also set the industry the "challenge" of achieving a 20 per cent reduction in the sugar content of a range of foods by 2020.

Manufacturers do not seem concerned with meeting those targets. The Food and Drink Federation has said that its members will cut sugar at their own pace, not on the government's timetable. Clearly Mrs May's attempt at gently coaxing the industry into action has failed. Now Britain needs a properly robust obesity strategy.

The sugar tax should apply not just to drinks, but food too. The government should commit to halving England's childhood obesity levels within ten years, as David Cameron intended to do. Purveyors of junk food should also face much

stricter regulation. They should not be able to advertise on television before the watershed, or during programmes popular with children. Curbs on packaging are needed too. The evidence is incontrovertible: the blander a product's wrapping and the clearer the health warnings, the less likely consumers are to lift it from supermarket shelves.

The food industry says that the reduction of sugar should be gradual, as it was with salt, to give consumers' taste buds time to adapt. The advantages of this approach to producers is clear. The advantage to consumers, less so. Children's taste buds hardly need time to adapt, and adults would make their peace soon enough. More importantly, they would be healthier sooner.

In his budget speech Philip Hammond, the chancellor, celebrated the fact that the sugar tax on drinks has raised less money than expected. The reason, he said, was that drink manufacturers had rushed to cut sugar from their products. The lesson for ministers is clear: when it comes to cutting sugar content, coercive measures work and mere cajoling does not. The government must face down the lobbyists and put public health first.