



TOWARDS A POSSIBLE EUROPEAN SCHOOL FRUIT SCHEME

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THE CONSULTATION

In September 2007, the European Union adopted a wide-ranging reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Fruit and Vegetables¹ to promote the competitiveness and market orientation of this sector and bring it more closely in line with the rest of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). One of the objectives of the reformed CMO is to reverse the declining consumption of fruit and vegetables.

The importance of fruit and vegetables consumption as part of a healthy diet is also advocated by the White Paper on 'Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity'², which stresses the need for coherent action at European level and draws attention to the role the CAP could play in shaping the European diet, especially to combat obesity and overweight. It states that “*a School Fruit Scheme would be a step in the right direction*”.

When approving the CMO 'Fruit and Vegetables' reform, the Council issued the following declaration³: *"In light of the dramatic increase in obesity amongst schoolchildren, which has been highlighted in the recently published Commission White Paper ... the Council invites the Commission to come forward with a proposal for a school fruit scheme as soon as possible based on an impact assessment of the benefits, practicability and administrative costs involved."*

In keeping with the Commission's commitment to better legislation, the presentation of a 'School Fruit Scheme' proposal will be conditional on the conclusions of an assessment demonstrating its value added at European level and analysing the advantages and drawbacks of different options⁴.

To help bring together the range of expertise necessary for this assessment and to facilitate the preparation of the proposal, this work has been entrusted to an Inter-Service Group (ISG) made up of representatives of the Commission services concerned.

Since it was set up in September 2007, the ISG has organised a series of hearings with experts, promoters of school fruit schemes, stakeholders and the Member States. The contributions received within this consultation process can be found on the 'School Fruit Scheme' webpage:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/index_en.htm

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/capreform/fruitveg/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/keydocs_nutrition_en.htm

³ Council declaration in the framework of the CMO 'Fruit and Vegetables' reform on 15th June 2007

⁴ Minutes of the European Commission meeting 6th June 2007

On the basis of these consultations, the ISG has identified four options for a European 'School Fruit Scheme'.

The ISG is now seeking contributions to enrich these options, and to help assess their feasibility and possible impact. Contributions should be sent:

- preferably by e-mail: AGRI-HORT-SCHOOLFRUIT@ec.europa.eu
- or alternatively by post: 'School Fruit Scheme'
LOI 130 7/47
European Commission
130, rue de la Loi
B-1049 Brussels

Contributions received by 29th February 2008 – the closing date of the consultation – will be taken into account in the report.

2. OBJECTIVES

Within the Member States of the European Union, a wealth of initiatives and programmes providing fruit and vegetables to children in school settings already exists. These national, regional or local programmes are managed by agriculture or educational authorities or NGOs, with or without the help of public funding⁵.

Initiatives promoting healthier diet and the consumption of fruit and vegetables also exist at European level. These include fruit and vegetables promotion programmes within the CMO or in the framework of the general agricultural promotion programmes⁶, actions initiated by the members of the European Platform for Diet, Physical activity and Health⁷ and research projects on the relationship between the consumption of fruit and vegetables and a healthy diet, funded under the EU's Framework Programmes for research and technological development⁸.

A European 'School Fruit Scheme' could provide a framework and means to enrich, strengthen, ensure coherence and promote new initiatives aimed at durably increasing the share of fruit and vegetables in the diet of schoolchildren, at an age when eating habits are shaped.

According to the ISG, the objectives of such a scheme would be to:

- Increase the long-term consumption of fruit and vegetables among schoolchildren;
- Foster healthy eating habits among schoolchildren, so contributing to a lasting improvement in health and a decline in obesity;
- Facilitate access to initiatives promoting the consumption of fruit and vegetables by schoolchildren in poorer regions and among disadvantaged sections of the population;

⁵ This became evident at the EGEA conference on 'The role of Fruit and Vegetables in the fight against Obesity', Brussels 17th to 19th April 2007, and also during the consultation process within the ongoing impact assessment.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/prom/index_en.htm

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/platform/platform_en.htm

⁸ <http://cordis.europa.eu/food/projects.htm>

- Bring Europe closer to its citizens by responding to their real concerns.

In order to compare the merits of various options for the implementation of a European Scheme, the following criteria are also deemed to be relevant:

- The cost-effectiveness of the scheme, which should justify European action in this field, taking into account the limited scope of the EU budget for such an initiative;
- The possibility to adapt the actions supported to the specific needs and capacities of various local, regional and national contexts.

In addition, the possible beneficial effects on the environment of each of the options could be taken into consideration.

3. THE OPTIONS

The ISG identified four options for the implementation of a European 'School Fruit Scheme' which will be explored during the impact assessment process. They are not mutually exclusive; some of their elements could be combined to form a new option.

Option 1: Status Quo

Under this option, there would be no new initiative at European level ('no policy change scenario'). The ongoing Member State activities are judged sufficient. These include the measures within the CMO 'fruit and vegetables', the general promotion programmes, the activities of the European Platform and the EU's framework programmes for research but most of all, the initiatives already in place in several EU Member states.

This option not only serves as a reference for assessing all other options but is itself a real policy option.

Option 2: Networking

In order to benefit from the existing diverse experience across the European Union, of providing fruit and vegetables to children in school settings, under this option the EU would establish and fund an electronically based network of experts and project promoters, host regular 'best practice' conferences and organise regional seminars.

In a number of Member States, a variety of stakeholders are promoting all kinds of projects, which include the distribution of fruit and vegetables to schoolchildren. These project and programme promoters face similar issues and obstacles in their daily work but they have found different approaches to deal with them. Bringing together regional project promoters from the agricultural, health and education sectors can facilitate the exchange of experience and the transfer of know-how.

Option 3: Supporting initiatives

The European Union would support initiatives for the promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption at school. These would be selected from projects identified by Member States on the basis of a call for proposals, which would include some common general eligibility criteria. These could be, for example, the active involvement of the public health and education institutions in programme design and implementation; monitoring and evaluation; priority targeting at younger schoolchildren; multi-annual programming. Beyond the supply of produce, the initiatives supported could include accompanying activities aimed at changing the eating habits of schoolchildren, such as training and awareness-raising initiatives, the production of specific promotional material, site visits and field trips.

The implementation would be modelled roughly on the current promotion programmes, with management shared between the Commission and Member States. The latter would draw up a provisional list of programmes they had selected and forward it to the Commission, which would have to decide which programmes to co-finance.

The EU's possible financial contribution to the programmes could be modulated and not exceed, for instance, 50% of the real cost, except in convergence regions where it could be raised to reach 75%. Co-financing would be compulsory; the proposing organisations would have to fund part (for instance 20%) of the real costs of the programmes concerned.

Option 4: Driving initiatives

The European Union would establish a fund for the purchase of fruit and vegetables to be distributed in schools. Possible accompanying activities to promote fruit and vegetable consumption would be funded by the Member States and other relevant stakeholders. The fund allocation per Member State would follow common objective criteria, such as the number of children in the target group. The implementation mechanisms would be similar to the current 'School Milk Programme'⁹.

In principle, all kinds of fruit and vegetables (fresh and processed, regardless of country of origin¹⁰) would be eligible for funding. However, the Commission would establish a negative list of products, proven either to be unhealthy or to have no positive effect on health (e.g. produce with a high energy density or added sugar).

4. QUESTIONS

The ISG is aware that the options it has chosen to explore take account of a limited series of factors and that, without modification, they do not prefigure the full range of political choices that could be offered to the Commission.

Therefore, the Commission is seeking contributions from interested parties, who are encouraged not only to evaluate these options, but also enrich them and help assess their feasibility and possible impact:

- (1) **Which** is the option preferred?

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/milk/index_en.htm

¹⁰ Given the EU international trade obligations no discrimination of produce on basis of country of origins possible would be possible in the context of the scheme.

- What, in your experience, are the necessary conditions for a successful initiative, able to promote a sustainable increase in the consumption of fruit and vegetables by young people and to have a lasting influence on their behaviour?
- What are the main obstacles to a successful initiative?
- What would be good criteria for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of an initiative?
- What would be the value added of an EU initiative in this field?

(2) **How** could it be improved?

- Are there factors not taken into account or elements of uncertainty that could significantly influence the impact of the options under consideration? If so, what are they? What would be their influence?
- Should the ISG seek to incorporate into its analysis an assessment of any specific impacts other than those envisaged in chapter 2?
- Do you have any examples of 'best practice' that could improve the options?
- What conditions (compulsory and/or optional) should be introduced and/or developed for the 'Supporting Initiatives' and 'Driving Initiatives' options?

(3) Is there any **other option** that you would consider adequate to reach the stated objectives?

You are invited to complete the matrix at the end of this document, which sets out the four options and seven objectives. This will make it easier for us to assess the input by the public and make a comparison between the options.

Please note

A summary of contributions received will be included in an annex to the Impact Assessment report foreseen for May 2008. All contributions received will be published on the Internet, unless specifically requested not to do so.

For regularly updated information on the next steps of the Impact Assessment exercise, please consult the 'School Fruit Scheme' webpage:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/index_en.htm

	Status Quo	Networking	Supporting Initiatives	Driving Initiatives
Long term increase of fruit and vegetables consumption among school children				
Decrease in obesity of school children and health improvement				
Increased fruit and vegetables consumption in poorer regions and by deprived persons				
Appropriate level of initiative and administration; European value added				
Appropriate disbursement of public funds (both national and EU)				
Positive impact on the environment				
Bringing Europe closer to its citizens				

Grading: the option would have a (1) very negative impact (2) negative impact (3) neutral impact (4) positive impact (5) very positive impact;