

AN OPEN LETTER TO UK FOOD AND DRINK RETAILERS

Thursday 22 June 2023

We are writing as leading health charities, food campaign organisations and medical bodies to express our concern at the Government's decision to delay the incoming multi-buy price promotions restrictions in England, designed to limit excessive purchasing of food and drink high in fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS). We know that as the UK's largest retailers, you will have been working hard with your suppliers and manufacturers to prepare for the introduction of the new regulations. Many of you will now share our dismay. We welcome the commitments by retailers who have confirmed that they are standing firm in their removal of these deals.

We strongly urge all retailers to do the right thing for children's health, and not allow the Government's hesitation to erode or divert your efforts to phase out multi-buy HFSS promotions by October 2023.

We know that, especially in the midst of current cost-of-living pressures, you want to offer the best value to your customers. More than ever, it is vital for families to be able to afford nutritious food. However, the evidence is clear that multi-buy promotions on HFSS food do not save people money and can act to displace healthier food and drink from shopping baskets.

Customers can also be offered value without increasing the volume of unhealthy purchases. We urge you to put healthier products in the promotional spotlight and avoid promotions that lead to excess purchase and consumption of HFSS food and drink.

More than one in three children are at risk of developing food-related ill health. If you are growing up in an area of high deprivation, you are more than twice as likely to be impacted. The Government and industry need to show leadership and take bigger, bolder preventive steps to protect children's health, and address unacceptable inequalities in health outcomes.

We welcome the assurances of retailers who have already re-committed to ending multi-buy HFSS promotions, in response to their own customer insight on desire for healthier food. We urge you to stand firm despite the Government delay. We call on all retailers to join you, so that when the legislation finally comes into force, you have shown leadership in achieving the transformation we need. We will be following the response of the food retail sector closely and remain ready to champion the efforts of those retailers working hardest to achieve healthier in-store experiences for their customers, and a healthier future for our children.

Signed:

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James Toop, CEO, Bite Back 2030

Nigel Shattock, Director of Communications & Engagement, World Cancer Research Fund

Professor David Strain, Chair, BMA Board of Science Committee

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