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News release

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Pressure grows to protect children from “junk” food ads

This week the National Consumer Council and the National Federation of Women’s Institutes become the latest bodies to add their considerable influence to the campaign to protect children from “junk” food advertising, bringing the number of supporting national organisations to 83 (1).

This announcement coincides with today’s publication by the International Association of Consumer Food Organisations, warning of the danger to children’s health worldwide from junk food marketing (2). It also comes hot on the heels of the Parliamentary Health Committee Inquiry into Obesity, which is particularly concerned about the rising rates of childhood obesity, and in the wake of the statement by the Government’s principal medical advisor - the Chief Medical Officer, that “There is a case for adopting the precautionary principle for the marketing of foods to children”(3).

NFWI National Chairman, Barbara Gill said:

“At our AGM on 11 June, 94% of Women’s Institutes voted in favour of a resolution urging the Government to regulate the promotion to children of foods that contribute to an unhealthy diet and to ensure increased opportunities for exercise and practical food education in schools. WI members are deeply concerned that current Government initiatives are tinkering at the edges of the problem when what is needed is comprehensive cross-departmental action. In the coming months our members (4) will be taking action to ensure that Government responds to our concerns.”

Deirdre Hutton, Chair of the National Consumer Council (5) stated:

“UK children face the heaviest onslaught across Europe from TV ads for junk food and one of the heaviest worldwide. The industry uses sophisticated and subtle techniques with a two-pronged attack on both children and their parents, persuading them to choose junk food. Self-regulation in the UK is clearly not working effectively to protect the health interests of vulnerable children. Society

is paying the price with obesity. The time has come to consider banning junk food TV adverts targeted at children and making the food industry more socially responsible.”

(more...)

Jeanette Longfield, Co-ordinator of Sustain (6) added:

“ We are delighted to welcome such prestigious organisations to our long and growing list of supporters. We are eagerly awaiting the results of the Food Standards Agency’s review of the research in this area, and are confident it will confirm that government action is long overdue.”

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

1. See attached for complete list, along with the statement “Protecting children from unhealthy food advertising” which the organisations endorsed.
2. *Broadcasting Bad Health: Why food marketing to children needs to be controlled*, prepared by the Food Commission (020-7837-2250 – www.foodcomm.org.uk on behalf of the International Association of Consumer Food Organisations.
3. *Health Check on the State of the Public Health: Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2002*. July 2003, Department of Health: London
4. The National Federation of Women's Institutes is the largest women's organisation in the UK with over 230,000 members. www.nfwi.org.uk
5. The National Consumer Council is an independent consumer expert, championing the consumer interest to bring about change for the benefit of all consumers. www.ncc.org.uk
6. Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent over 100 national public interest organisations, and are independent from the agri-food industry. www.sustainweb.org