

## On-pack information key to helping consumers make informed choices on sugar intake

Written by Sigrid Ligné on 4 March 2016 in Opinion Plus  
Opinion Plus

Whether at EU or national level, the European soft drinks industry is at the forefront of sugar and calorie reduction, writes Sigrid Ligné.



Improving EU citizens' health by reducing calories is a much discussed topic. Last month the Dutch EU Council Presidency released its Roadmap for Action on Food Product Improvement and held a conference that brought together national governments, the food industry and NGOs to work together to address the issue.

Meanwhile The European Commission's health directorate DG SANTE is moving ahead with its Sugar Reduction Annex and exploring how member states and the different food sectors can contribute to reducing the amount of sugar in our diets.

Certainly many of us need to reduce our calorie intake. Clear information on how to achieve this by eating a balanced diet and leading a healthy active lifestyle is essential.

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So what has the European Soft Drinks sector been doing to reduce sugar and help people better manage their calorie intake? Well actually quite a lot. The average calories per 100ml of soft drinks have been reduced by 11.5 per cent since 2000 and soft drinks represent less than three per cent of the calories in an average European diet.

We approach calorie reduction in a number of ways: we reformulate existing products to contain less sugar and calories; we introduce new products with low or no calories; and we create a greater choice of single-serve packs making portion control easier.

We also provide clear, front-of-pack calorie labelling so that people can see what drinks they are buying for themselves and their families.

Soft drinks is a highly innovative sector with reformulation and new product development a continual process.

Many core products have been reformulated to reduce their sugar: Schweppes Agrum for example now contains 45 per cent less sugar than the original product, and brands such as Fanta and Sprite now contain 30 per cent less sugar in many markets.

Around half of all new product introductions since 2000 have been no or low calorie drinks and these no sugar versions now account for more than 30 per cent of sales in many EU markets.

New, reduced calorie drinks such as Coke Life and Pepsi Next have also been introduced. Soft drinks companies now offer a full portfolio of drinks to suit every occasion with the choice of full sugar, mid-range sugar or no sugar.

Meanwhile, we have expanded the number of single serve packs available. The range has increased by 150 per cent since 2000 and there are now 30 different packaging formats smaller than the standard 330ml on the market.

They come in a variety of recyclable packaging options including cans, PET plastic bottles, cartons and glass.

As an industry we believe that on-pack consumer information plays an important part in educating people and helping them make informed choices.

Back in 2007 we made a commitment to the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health to indicate full nutrition labelling on all products per 100ml and per serving, so that consumers don't have to do the maths.

We were also the first sector to introduce at-a-glance front-of-pack labelling, indicating calories per portion and per 100ml, as well as the percentage contribution to guideline daily amounts of calories and nutrients, such as sugar.

The soft drinks industry has gone further than the EU legislation as nutrition labelling is not legally required until December 2016 and there is no legal requirement at all for front-of-pack labelling.

As well as action at European level, we have worked with governments and other food and drink sectors to sign up to calorie reduction initiatives at national level across Europe.

Many markets have introduced initiatives – including Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands and the UK – and the soft drinks sector is proud to have been a part of every one of them.

## About the author

Sigrid Ligné is the Director General of the Union of European Soft Drinks Associations (UNESDA)

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