

How the soft drinks industry will reduce added sugars by 10 per cent by 2020

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The soft drinks industry has undertaken a number of efforts to reduce added sugars by 10 per cent by 2020, explains Sigrid Ligné.



How will the soft drinks industry reduce added sugars? | *Photo credit: Fotolia*

Earlier this year the European soft drinks industry committed to reduce added sugars by a further 10 per cent by 2020. The sector has already reduced calories by 12 per cent since 2000, so how does it intend to achieve this additional 10 per cent reduction?

We will do this by accelerating the speed and scale of our current efforts. Let me explain.

The added sugars reduction target will be achieved through a combination of four key actions: First,

reformulating existing products to reduce their sugar content - including using no and low-calorie sweeteners. This is an ongoing process and many of the brands that are on sale today contain 40 per cent less sugar than they did a few years ago.

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The second approach is through innovation to introduce new products with no or reduced sugar. Today, no and reduced sugar products represent 66 per cent of new product innovations.

Our third tool to reduce added sugars is by increasing the availability and range of smaller pack sizes. This allows portion control and encourages moderation in consumption. The availability of pack sizes smaller than 330ml has increased by 150 per cent since 2006. There are now over 30 different small packs to suit every drinking occasion - including cans, bottles, PET and pouches.

The fourth element is promotion. Our industry will increase investment behind the promotion of no and reduced sugar drinks in order to educate consumers and actively encourage choice towards those products with less sugar. Already advertising spend behind no and low drinks has doubled in many markets in recent years and this has borne fruit: No and low-calorie drinks now represent over 40 per cent of soft drinks sales, in a number of European markets.

Importantly, our industry will ensure that it is accountable and will monitor its progress in added sugars reduction using independent, external researchers. We will share this data with all stakeholders in full transparency.

The soft drinks sector has been on an added sugars reduction journey since the 1970s when the first no and low-calorie drinks were introduced. We have already reduced calories by 12 per cent since 2000, so why are we stepping up our added sugars reduction efforts now? .

First, reducing added sugars in our products addresses changing consumer preferences. Our customers are more conscious than ever about their sugar and calorie intake. We support the views of the world's leading health authorities that people should control their added sugars intake - and that includes sugar from soft drinks.

Reducing added sugars in soft drinks leads directly to reduced calories and our sector is committed to playing its part in reducing overall calorie consumption in order to address overweight and obesity. Our members have already taken part in initiatives at national level across the EU and reducing added sugars by an aggregate 10 per cent across Europe will impact over 500 million consumers.

Added sugars reduction also responds to the EU call for reformulation and sugar reduction across the food industry. We endorse the EU roadmap for action on food product improvement and are proud to be the first sector to respond to the EU added sugar annex and its 10 per cent sugar reduction target.

We fully support European health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis' ambition that all sectors must

play their part and are honoured that he has responded positively to our new initiative. We hope that others will follow suit in order to generate critical mass.

The EU's partnership-based policy approach to reformulation and sugar reduction involves all stakeholders in driving a successful strategy and is most welcome. It allows for flexibility to reflect local situations and optimise a variety of tools in achieving the reduction goal. This enables our industry to deliver speed and scale and to triple the pace of our added sugars reduction up to 2020.

About the author

Sigrid Ligné is Director General of UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe

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