

Press release



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Health Committee Report: voluntary controls on food marketing doomed to fail

While Sustain warmly welcomes the measures that will have a positive effect on children's diets, the Health Select Committee's Inquiry into Obesity recommendations, published today, will do nothing to prevent the marketing of unhealthy foods to children [1]. Over the three year period of delay recommended by the Committee, more than one hundred thousand children may become obese [2].

It is now more than ten years since Sustain first called upon the industry to show social responsibility in its food promotion to children [3], a call which has recently been repeated by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) [4] and the Chief Medical Officer [5]. However, in spite of the overwhelming support from parents [6] and national organisations [7], industry has resisted the need to change their exploitative and unhealthy marketing to children.

Comments from the Food Advertising Unit (FAU) and the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) this month confirm that industry will not change its ways. The FAU stated that advertising does not increase food consumption [8], whilst the FDF has denied that 'unhealthy' foods exist [9]. This flies in the face of the Inquiry into Obesity report.

Charlie Powell from Sustain stated, "*The Health Select Committee has missed a golden opportunity to remove a negative influence children's diets by failing to recommend a ban on junk food advertising. The industry will simply continue to present fatty, sugary and salty foods to children as positive and desirable choices*".

Sustain's Children's Food Bill was presented to Parliament last week by Debra Shipley MP [10]. Supported by 114 national organisations, the Bill will recommend legislation to protect children from unhealthy food promotions and improve children's diets and health through regulations to improve the quality of children's food and their food education.

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Editorial notes

[1] House of Commons Health Committee, *Obesity, Third Report of Session 2003-04*, Volume 1, published 27 May 2004.

[2] Based on figures from the Government Health Survey 2002, the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF) estimates that at current trends 530,000 additional children will become overweight and 127,000 will become obese over a three year period.

[3] See: Dibb S., (1993), *Children: Advertisers' Dream, Nutrition Nightmare? – The case for more responsibility in food advertising*, Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance).

[4] See FSA Board paper 04/03/02, para 14: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsa040302.pdf

[5] See Chief Medical Officer's, *Annual Health Check Report 2002*, Obesity: Action Recommended: www.doh.gov.uk

[6] For instance, in a BBC survey of 9,000 people, published on 24 March 2004, 81% strongly supported a ban on fast food and sweet adverts on television when children are watching. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3561483.stm>

[7] For a current list of organisations supporting the Children's Food Bill which will introduce legislation to protect children from unhealthy food marketing, see: www.sustainweb.org/child_sup.asp

[8] As reported in, "*With one in four children overweight, the experts explain what can be done about it*", The Independent, 26 May 2004.

[9] FDF press release, 18 May 2004: "*Unhealthy food criteria idea outdated says food industry*" available from www.fdf.org.uk/home.aspx

[10] The Children's Food Bill was presented to Parliament with cross-party support by Debra Shipley MP on 18 May 2004. For more information about the Children's Food Bill or to download a copy of the Bill, visit: www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodbill

[11] *Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming* advocates food and agricultural 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. Sustain represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. Membership is open to national organisations which do not distribute profits to private shareholders and which therefore operate in the public interest.