Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol ar Atal iechyd gwael - gordewdra

This response was submitted to the Health and Social Care Committee consultation on Prevention of ill health - obesity

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Dairy UK response to the Welsh Health and Social Care Committee on prevention of ill health - obesity

Dairy UK is a trade association representing dairy processors operating in the UK. Between them, our members collect and process the majority of milk produced in the UK.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of the Welsh Government strategy, regulations and associated actions to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales, including consideration of:

- gaps/areas for improvement in existing policy and the current regulatory framework;
- interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity.

Interventions in pregnancy and early childhood

In terms of interventions in pregnancy and early childhood to promote good nutrition and prevent obesity, milk and dairy products are nutrient-rich, contributing positively to the diets of young children and providing the most calcium, iodine, riboflavin, potassium, vitamin A, vitamin D and zinc to the diets of 1–3-year-olds in the UK[1].

It has also been documented in the literature that the inclusion of dairy in the diets of infants and young children helps to improve health and developmental outcomes[2] without contributing to weight gain[3,4,5]. Additionally, there is evidence that milk protein has a positive effect on bone health for both mothers[6] and children[7].

Iodine, of which dairy is a key source in the UK diet, is needed to make thyroid hormones which regulate foetal brain and nervous system development. While breastfeeding, a mother's calcium requirements increase considerably, and it is well known that milk and dairy foods are excellent sources of this nutrient. It has been reported that higher intake of dairy products is linked to better folate, vitamin B6 and B12 status[8]. This is of particular importance for women of childbearing age as inadequate maternal folate intake increases the risk of neural tube defects.

It is well documented that maternal weight status directly impacts subsequent birth weight. A review looking at dietary intake during pregnancy and subsequent birthweight concluded that "consumption of whole foods such as fruit, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and lean meats throughout pregnancy appears beneficial for appropriate birthweight"[9]. Furthermore, fermented dairy products such as yogurt and cheese have been shown to reduce the risk of postpartum weight retention, possibly due to their anti-inflammatory properties, or their content of bioactive peptides and probiotics which are known to have a role in weight management[10]. Additionally, dairy products exhibit positive impacts on glycaemic control in pregnant women which may be attributable to its content of fat, calcium, magnesium, potassium and whey protein[11].

Gaps/areas for improvement in existing policy and the current regulatory framework (including in relation to food/nutrition and physical activity)

Any measure introduced in this context presents a real opportunity to reinforce positive dietary behaviour and promote the consumption of nutrient-rich and healthy foods which provide the nutrients needed at all stages of life. It is for this reason that we encourage recognition of dairy's nutritional value in all existing and future policy measures in Wales.

Over-simplistic nutrition policies can often have unintended consequences and impact the wrong foods. Even though dairy products contain variable amounts of calories, saturated fat, sodium and/or free sugars, they should be allowed to contribute to these nutrient intakes, as these come within a natural package comprised also of beneficial minerals and nutrients, many of which are under-consumed by the population.

In particular, significant proportions of the UK population do not meet recommended intakes for a number of essential nutrients from the food they eat. According to National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) figures[1]:

- 18% of teenagers do not meet their recommended dietary intake for riboflavin;
- 15% of teenagers do not meet their recommended dietary intake for calcium;
- 24% of teenagers and 10% of adults do not meet their recommended dietary intake for iodine;
- 30% of teenagers and 17% of adults do not meet their recommended dietary intake for potassium.

Dairy products have an important role to play in addressing these inadequate micronutrient intakes:

- A 200ml glass of plain semi-skimmed milk or flavoured milk is a source of protein, calcium, riboflavin, potassium, iodine and phosphorus. In addition, plain milk is also a source of vitamins B12 and B5.
- A 30g standard portion of Cheddar is a source of protein, calcium, phosphorus, vitamin B12 and vitamin A.
- A 150g pot of low-fat fruit yogurt is a source of protein, calcium, potassium, iodine, riboflavin, phosphorus, vitamin B12 and thiamin.

Although sweetened varieties of milk and yogurt contain higher levels of added sugar than the plain ones, they can be an important source of vitamins and minerals for people who do not consume the plain varieties – in these cases, they may be necessary for achieving a healthy diet.

In addition, dairy companies have been reformulating their products over the years to meet consumer choice for lower-calorie and lower-sugar products and have made great progress in the context of Public Health England's reformulation programme: retail yogurts and fromage frais achieved a 13.5% reduction in sugar from 2015 to 2020, and retail milk-based drinks reduced their sugar by 30%, a years in advance of the 2021 target of 20%[12].

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