

PRESS INFORMATION



Major outcome of the International Conference on Saturated Fat: new evidence on neutral or even positive health effects of saturated fatty acids found in milk fat; intake recommendations need therefore to be reconsidered.

In order to make EU policy makers aware of the recent scientific findings on health effects of milk fat and their implications for policy making, the European Dairy Association organized in collaboration with the Danish Dairy Board the International Conference on Saturated Fat in Copenhagen.

Brussels, 29 September 2009

The European Dairy Association (EDA) and the Danish Dairy Board (DDB) gathered internationally renowned scientists in Copenhagen to present the latest scientific findings on the health impact of milk fat intake. The major conclusion from the conference was that there is no conclusive evidence with regards to negative health effects of saturated fatty acids from milk fat. The scientists stated that there is no reason for considering saturated fatty acids as a single group anymore, and that more research is needed in order to make well-founded policy recommendations with regards to the intake of saturated fatty acids. In this framework, the scientists agreed that one needs to be very careful when proposing a tax on saturated fat as it is the case in Denmark right now.

Last Friday, the EDA and DDB organised the International Conference on Saturated Fat in Copenhagen. At this half-day conference, international scientists with expertise in scientific research on milk fat intake shared the latest findings in this area with more than 50 Danish and European scientific and political stakeholders.

Saturated Fat: recent scientific findings suggest prudence in intake recommendations

The international conference was opened by **Prof. Arne Astrup** (University of Copenhagen) who sketched the context in which this conference is held, i.e. the ongoing debate on the intake of saturated fatty acids, the recent publication of the EFSA "Draft Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for Fat" which suggests for public consultation to keep the



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intake of saturated fat as low as possible, and the proposed saturated fat levy in Denmark. Prof. Astrup asked himself the question whether this Danish proposition is substantiated by evidence-based science.

The Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries **Eva Kjer Hansen** stressed that the reason for this taxation proposal is to ensure that consumers make healthy food choices, a final goal to which also elements such as pricing, labelling and consumer information should contribute. She stated that research on saturated fatty acids in various areas should provide the knowledge necessary for the government to formulate sound recommendations. For Ms. Hansen the health of the consumer is a shared responsibility of the government, the consumer, the food industry and the retailers.

For the Director of the Danish Dairy Board **Michael Stevns** it goes without saying that dairy products are making a substantial contribution to nutrient intake of the Danish population and is therefore part of the daily healthy diet. M. Stevns showed that milk consumption in Denmark has changed towards skimmed milk in the last years and that a variety of dairy products with different energy content are already available. Without regulatory intervention and due to different reasons saturated fat intake in Denmark decreased by 25% in the last decade showing that there is no need for a regulation on saturated fat. He finally stated that the proposed saturated fat levy could potentially extend life expectation by five days.

Prof. Bruce German (University of California) told the attendants that evidence from the past five years has changed the view and understanding of the effects of fat on cholesterol metabolism. First, dietary cholesterol is not affecting blood cholesterol. Scientific evidence does not support the assumption that saturated fat intake should be as low as possible as this is often considered as "zero". Moreover, Prof. German suggested that, in personalized diets, appropriate doses of saturated fats are likely to have a beneficial impact.

French **Professor Philippe Legrand** (University of Rennes) indicated that based on latest science there is no reason to consider saturated fatty acids as a single group anymore in terms of structure, metabolism, functions and deleterious effects. Only three of the many different saturated fatty acids found in milk fat should now be considered as atherogenic. Some saturated fatty acids in milk fat might even have beneficial effects on the cholesterol metabolism. For him, the saturated fatty acids in dairy products have an interesting composition. He pleaded for more precise studies to investigate further on a possible dose-effect and to put the different saturated fatty acids into perspective.

Finally **Professor Peter Elwood** (Cardiff University) presented the results of a meta-analysis and systematic review of all cohort studies on the association between dairy and health. He presented some remarkable results: milk consumption is associated with a 19% reduction in heart disease, dairy foods are associated with a 21% reduction in diabetes, and milk tends to reduce risk of stroke. Prof. Elwood concluded that a call should be issued for further evidence from cohort studies before any new advice is given on dairy foods, and before policy relating to dairy foods is changed.

In the panel discussion following the presentations and led by Prof. Astrup, scientists and attendants expressed their concerns about the potential taxation on saturated fat in Denmark which would also affect dairy products and the recommendations for reducing the intake of saturated fatty acids to a level as low as possible. Observations made included the danger and lack of carefulness of imposing taxes on natural foods as dairy products, and the need for putting this issue in a broader context taking into account the consequences of the tax and these recommendations on the consumers, the economy, etc. Prof. Astrup also underlined the reduction of cardiovascular mortality in Denmark the last 10-15 years.

Based on the scientific findings presented and the observations made, policy options for saturated fat need to be re-considered. With the increasing scientific insight into the interactions between saturated fatty acids and health, there is no conclusive evidence to make broad dietary recommendations on restricting saturated fat intake to as low as possible or even 'zero'.

More details and presentations from the conference can be found on www.sfc2009.com/uk.



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By organizing this conference, the EDA underlined once more the importance of dairy products in a healthy diet. Mr Werner Buck, President of the EDA: *'We believe that dairy products are part of a healthy and balanced diet and an important provider of many minerals and vitamins and high quality protein. Dairy products are much more than milk fat and more than saturated fat. Milk fat contains a wide variety of fatty acids. Saturated fatty acids should be considered individually and not as a whole group due to their different physiological effects. We are glad that recent scientific findings support our belief by clearly indicating that specific actions of some saturated fatty acids are even beneficial for human health.'*

'EU and Danish policymakers should strengthen dairy as a food for health, encourage consumption of dairy as part of a healthy diet, consider emerging scientific evidence on fatty acids contained in milk fat and their relation to health, and take into account the positive health aspects of dairy when discussing dairy in relation to EU and national nutrition and health policies', Buck concludes.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION

The European Dairy Association represents the interests of dairy processors in the European Union. The membership of the EDA consists of the national trade associations for dairy processors in each EU Member State.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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