

Self-regulation Initiatives to Improve the Fatty Acid Composition of Foods in the Netherlands

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Trans fatty acids (TFA) and saturated fatty acids (SAFA) both increase cholesterol levels and consequently the risk of cardiovascular disease. The last decade, the oils and fats industry has developed and applied innovations to reduce the amount of these fatty acids in their products. To stimulate the use of these innovations in the food industry and the fast food sector in the Netherlands, the vegetable oils and fats industry set up a Task Force. Members of the Task Force can be found in for instance the snack industry, fast food sector and (industrial) bakeries. Furthermore, this Task Force was developed in a good partnership with the government and public health organizations.

Aim of the Task Force is to collectively improve the fatty acid composition of foods, while maintaining the functional properties and preventing exceeding prices. This process needs a stepwise approach, and enough time to develop new technologies and create a broadly based policy. Taking the lead, the industry is able to take into account practical feasibility factors (like price, availability of raw material and technical impact) and to focus on the optimal reduction of both TFA and SAFA in a product.

One of the activities of the Task Force is a campaign to stimulate the use of liquid deep frying fats instead of solid deep frying fats in the fast food sector. This is realized by stimulating and creating consumer demand, with marketing tools like signposting and publicity.

Dutch intake and monitoring data on product level have illustrated that these industry initiatives are effective. The TFA intake decreased from 4.5 energy percent in 1988 to 1.1 energy percent in 2003. SAFA intake decreased from 14.7 to 12.9 energy percent. Recent monitoring data have shown major reductions in TFA content in several foods. Also the first small reductions in SAFA content are shown. Furthermore, in the fast food sector, the use of liquid deep frying fats strongly increased from 10% in 2003 to 50% by the end of 2006. Therefore, it can be concluded that collective self-regulation initiatives of the Dutch food industry have shown to be effective in improving fatty acid composition .