NEWSLETTER N. 17

ABSTRACT: Italy, Coop: the campaign against child obesity is about to start; The Los Angeles Times Survey: yes to junk food taxation; "Food 4U" European Campaign: the winner is Portugal

Italy, Coop: the campaign against child obesity is about to start

Italian large-scale retailers take the field against child obesity. In the second half of 2009 (June to December) Coop, an Italian cooperative which operates a major supermarket chain in Italy, launched a campaign for correct eating habits in childhood. Its authoritative scientific supervisors include: ECOG (European Childhood Obesity Group) and SIO (Italian Obesity Association). Three are the linchpins of the initiative: the CLUB 4-10 children's products line, developed according to the regulations contained in "Coop Guidelines for Correct Child Nutrition", a specific nutrition label and a dedicated website.

In particular, the range of food items for small children débuts with a “revolutionary” snack: a mini-pie made with flour, sugar, fresh eggs and fruit in two different flavours (apricot or cherry). As all Coop products, the snack has no food colourings, hydrogenated fats and GMO. Compared to other top-selling snacks, the Coop mini-pie has the highest fruit content (21.3 %) and fibre content (apricot 9.3%, cherry 10.5%) - which is helpful to lower the glycemic index - the lowest calories intake (less than 300 kcal per 100g), no salt, exclusively natural flavourings and its the only one with no added fats. Other 40 products will follow the mini-pie, all developed as breaks between meals with an appropriate nutritional profile. In addition, Coop is also committed to reformulating its existing own-branded products intended specifically for children in accordance with the latest Coop guidelines supervised by the Scientific Committee; where reformulation is not possible, non-standard products will be withdrawn.

Another essential aspect of the campaign is the nutrition label, which shall include the following information: nutrition table per 100 g. and per serving size, referring to: energy, proteins, carbohydrates, sugars, total and saturated fats, fibre and sodium. Where possible, the Guidelines Daily Amount (GDA) will also be indicated, showing in grammes and percentages the contribution of one serving size in terms of calories, sugars, total fats, saturated fats and sodium compared with the daily recommended amounts. Those are the nutrients to keep an eye on for the well-balanced nutrition of our children.

Finally, a dedicated website will be developed, with the aim to become an authoritative landmark for those who may want further information. An expert team (of paediatricians, nutritionists etc.) will be available to provide specific information and advice.
The Los Angeles Times Survey: yes to junk food taxation

Taxing junk food to fight obesity might be a solution against the spread of overweight, at least for most part of the sample interviewed by the Kaiser Family Foundation by appointment of the Los Angeles Times. According to the survey, 55% of the interviewees said to be in favour of junk food taxation.

The effects of sweetened drinks, French fries, candies and other junk food containing colourings and flavourings are often the subject of debate. In 2006, during the European Ministerial Conference in Istanbul, Turkey, the World Health Organisation issued a warning: by 2010 in Europe, one child out of ten will be obese.

The main reasons found by experts are the scarce physical exercise and the consumption of food rich in fats and sugar. For this reason, Latvia was the first EU country to decide to prohibit the sale of junk food in schools.

"Food 4U" European Campaign: the winner is Portugal

“Surprising in the ability to reveal an often underestimated fact. Entertaining in its development and conclusion. Performed and filmed with passion and professionalism. Straightforward, clear and concise in conveying an important message to the institutions as well as to each one of us”. This is the judgement on the award-winning video in the 5th Food 4U European Campaign that ended on September 24th in Rome. The "Food 4U - your food, your body, your video" competition offered students between 14 and 19 a chance to confront themselves about the need and the importance of healthy and correct eating habits through the production of a theme video.

The winner was Portugal, in particular the Bill Kill commercial developed by the Escola Profissional do Instituto Nun’Alvres of Santo Tirso. “The winner commercial – was the comment by the Italian Minister of Agricultural Policies Luca Zaia – gives an incredibly powerful message, underlining an aspect that is often underestimated by the new generations and by institutions themselves, i.e. the individual and social costs hidden behind bad eating habits”.

The 5th edition involved more than 6 million students and as many as 25,000 schools. Like in the past editions, this year the awareness raising campaign promoted by the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies invited students from 16 European
countries to participate in an international competition for the making of TV commercials on the importance of healthy and correct eating habits. The young film-makers made commercials about the importance of a healthy eating, saying no to obesity, no to junk food and to unhealthy lifestyles, no to kitchen tables dominated exclusively by globalised food.