

Carta científica

EATWELL Project: Approaching European healthy eating policies from a multi-disciplinary perspective

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The unification of Europe had, as one of its consequences, the narrowing of the differences in dietary patterns of the different countries and culinary cultures¹. Since the early 1960s, calorie intake in the EU increased on average by 17%; the most rapid increases happened in the Mediterranean countries that caught up with, or in some cases overtook, Central and Northern European levels, having as consequence a general rise in overweight and obesity prevalence². In the last 25 years a number of policies aimed at tackling diet-related chronic disease have been launched and actions have followed in all EU Countries. It is however not clear whether such actions have the desired impact, translated e.g. in terms of healthy eating or reduced diet-related chronic disease and mortality.

EATWELL (Interventions to Promote Healthy Eating Habits: Evaluation and Recommendations) is a new project funded by FP7 of the European Commission. It responds to the perceived need to provide accurate information for policy making. The overall objective of the project is to improve diet and health related policy interventions in Europe by providing a scientifically sound evidence of the effectiveness of past interventions. A three-stage procedure will be applied: (1) Assessment of the intervention's impact

on consumer attitudes, consumer behaviour and diets; (2) Impact of dietary changes on obesity and health; (3) The value attached by society to these changes, measured in life years gained, cost savings and QALYs.

EATWELL is divided in seven Work Packages (WP), all inter-related. WP1, mainly operational in the first year, has as overall objective benchmarking diet related policy action in EU member states and beyond. In order to achieve this, coordinated data collection was organized between October 2009 and March 2010. WP2, follows the previous one, by selecting a number of case-studies for further evaluation according to agreed harmonized indicators. WP3 brings the private sector experiences into the picture. Public initiatives can be enriched by previous experiences, and a number of lessons will be taken from successful private marketing. All these lessons will be further corroborated through a large Pan-European Survey in WP4 that will explore acceptability of certain types of policies in Member States. All results will be brought together by WP5 and a set of policies and actions will be recommended based on existing evidence. WP6 handles relations between EATWELL partners and a Stakeholder's group. Furthermore, it is devoted to dissemination, and had, as first output, the setting-up of a web page (<http://www.eatwellproject.eu>) and other dissemination materials. Finally, WP7 coordinates the project through all administrative and managerial tasks.

The main contribution of EATWELL to the scientific community is a fresh approach to obesity and healthy eating policies/actions that comes from a multi-disciplinary team that includes economists, public health nutritionists, historians and sociologists. Furthermore, it will provide specific recommendations

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for harmonised policy making in Europe through a one-stop guide to methods and indicators for interventions' evaluation, and outline data collection priorities for the future.

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