

21st CENTURY CONSUMER FOOD INFORMATION: IT'S COMING!

INTRODUCTION EVENT OF THE FOOD INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE (FITI)

18 November 2011, Résidence Palace, Rue de la Loi 155, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

The event was chaired by Dr Josephine Wills, Director-General of the European Food Information Council (EUFIC).

1. The Food Information Transparency Initiative (FITI)

The Food Information Transparency Initiative is a joint project of Orange House Partnership (www.orangeOhouse.eu), Schuttelaar & Partners (www.schuttelaar-partners.com), Bureau Brussels (www.bureaubrussels.eu) and Caesar Experts (www.caesar.nl). The concept was born as a challenging idea in September 2009 and gradually developed into a project proposal in summer 2010. Following a wide consultation round and numerous bilateral discussions with the European Commission, national food management authorities in the EU, multinational food producers and retailers, food certification organisations, consumer groups, environmental NGOs and other NGOs with an ethical objective, the project was modified and adjusted taking into account the many suggestions and critical advices received. Late spring 2011 the project management team considered that the project was ready to be presented and discussed with an audience comprising professionals from the public and private food sector. Subsequently, the project introduction event was announced in September 2011 to invited experts and took place on 18 November 2011 at the Residence Palace in Brussels. The agenda of the event is attached to this report as **Annex 1**. Some 61 experts attended the event and the list of participants is attached to this report as **Annex 2**.

2. Project Introduction

Mr Herman Koëter, Managing Director at Orange House Partnership and co-initiator and Chair of the FITI Project, introduced the initiative and indicated that the project is driven by consumer demand for better and more resourceful information. He further emphasised that the project is future oriented with respect to both the availability of modern communication tools and the type and level of detail of food information considered as relevant by the consumer. Therefore, the food information will be based on a building block approach, i.e. access to the food information provided can be personalised in accordance with the individual consumer's preference and priority for particular information (such as sugar/glucose content for a diabetic person). In other words, the consumer can choose the elements he considers important.

The project aims to better inform the consumer on the food product he intends to buy. The FITI approach will use modern digital technologies that allow presenting more food information more quickly than is possible by means of the label or other traditional information carriers. Especially young people are likely to become rapidly skilful in using such digital information.

The project is based on voluntary information and is complementary to the new Regulation [Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011 of 25 October 2011] on the provision of food information to consumers and fits seamlessly with the new Regulation's Article 35 about additional information. The project intends to work with and be endorsed by as many stakeholders as possible, initially focusing on the European Union. It aims at developing synergies in working together in the public and the private sector including consumer groups and is based on achieving consensus on codes of conduct and ethics for the provision of food information. The PowerPoint presentation of Herman Koëter is attached to this report as **Annex 3**.

3. Food information to consumers

Comprehensive, truthful and unambiguous labelling is fundamental to informed consumer choice. Food information must be understandable. Several speakers indicated that food information is often confusing, e.g. by the abundance of logos. Professor Patrick Wall of the University College of Dublin reminded the audience that there is no average EU consumer, that populations within member states are segmented and that concerns can be very different from segment to segment. He further mentioned that not only the rich should have understanding of the relationships between food and health.

Mr Wouter Vermeulen, Director Health and Wellness at Coca Cola Europe put forward that food information must be reliable, credible and science-based. He pointed to the power of informed choices.

There was agreement that food information should not be misleading and that any confusion should be prevented. The information provided should be understandable by broad layers of the population.

Ms Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC informed the meeting by video message that she believes that better food information would be welcomed by consumers. Dr Georg Schreiber, Head of Unit at the Food, Feed and Commodities Department of the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) stated that it is timely for authorities to think about systems on how to reach consumers with more adequate information and that attention should be paid to information that is not mandatory via labelling. Dr Inge Stoelhorst, Senior Policy Officer at the Dutch Ministry of Health, Wellness and Sports (VWS) stressed that it is important to provide objective information that is not patronizing. She believes that food information should be easily accessible and innovative and the label as such does not allow for this. She also mentioned that the project should facilitate making informed choices by consumers.

4. EU Food Information legislation

On 22 November 2011 the new EU Food Information Regulation was published in the Official Journal of the EU. It took more than 8 years to reach consensus on the new Regulation, which finally was adopted in October 2011. This lengthy process of negotiation illustrates that food information is a controversial issue and that the interests of the various stakeholders range from one end of the spectrum (only the bare minimum) to the other (tell it all). The scope of the new Regulation is food information, not just food labelling. The new Regulation also requires that voluntary food information is reliable and correct. The debates on Food Information will go on. Ms Kartika Liotard, MEP, highlighted that during the adoption process of the new Food Information Regulation the debates about what must be mandatory on the label had been intense. She regretted that the colour coding (traffic light) labelling did not make it as a mandatory information item. She reminded the meeting of research that had shown that people make their product choice in a very short time. She

strongly believes that there is a need for simple and easy-to-understand information so that an informed (and hopefully often healthy) decision can be made rapidly.

Several speakers, including Ms Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, Deputy Head of Unit at DG SANCO, concluded that the FITI project is not in any way conflicting or competing with the new EU Food Information Regulation. The project builds on it as it addresses the modernization of the food information arena. More specifically, it offers alternative means of providing information both as included in the new Regulation and relevant additional elements.

5. The FITI project is complementary to EU legislation!

All speakers agreed that the food label currently remains the basic source of food information. However, the Food Information Regulation also mentions that in order to take account of changes and developments in the field of food information, provisions should be made to empower the Commission to enable certain particulars to be made available by alternative means. Consequently, information provision may not only be provided in addition to the information on the food label but may also replace it. In July 2011 Commissioner John Dalli also referred to other means of communicating food information. The FITI approach makes it possible to deliver considerably more relevant information than possible via any food label.

The speakers agreed that for the coming years the FITI approach will not replace food labelling but be a valuable addition to it. It will allow for individualised access to a huge amount of food information presented in the order of priority and level of detail as indicated by the user. Mr Robert Madelin, Director General of DG INFOS said that this information will be made available at relatively low cost. In addition, Ms Goyens of BEUC mentioned that the information can be tailored so that consumers can choose the information elements they consider most important.

Mr Rutger Schilpzand, Partner at Schuttelaar & Partners and co-initiator of the FITI project indicated that the FITI project provides a further step in the debate on food labelling. But in order to make a further step there is a need for consensus. He added that it is of utmost importance that many stakeholders, the 27 member states and the European Institutions are all involved in the debate.

Mr Schreiber of BVL put forward that it remains the task of authorities and producers to ensure that the public is well informed on safety issues of food and expressed the hope that the project would take food safety issues into account as well.

Ms Stoelhorst of the Dutch Ministry of Health said that the use of smart phone applications offers very interesting possibilities and that the FITI project provides an opening to deliver information by these alternative ways. She added that discussions among the EU member states is ongoing and will show what is eventually possible in Brussels.

6. The nature of the provided information

A fundamental aspect of the project is that the owner of the food product not only provides the information, he also remains the owner of the information and maintains and updates the information as appropriate. However, all food information made available must be in compliance with Codes of Conduct, Ethical Principles and defined criteria for frequently used concepts such as 'sustainable', 'biological', 'organic' and several others. Reaching consensus on such codes, principles and criteria (or accepting those adopted by other organisations) among all stakeholders involved will form the core of the project. The product owner will ensure that all information he provides is in full compliance with these agreements. Hence, the initiators of the FITI project are not the authority to

judge the truthfulness of the information. Although national food authorities and specialised organisations may play a role as auditors in this respect, the FITI is predominantly based on self-control among all participating stakeholders.

7. Communication of Information

Mr Freek Van Eijk, IT expert at Caesar Experts demonstrated in a showcase of the anticipated project outcome how a plethora of food information would be accessible through a smart phone, supermarket scanner or home computer. This would include: ingredients, nutrition, safety, health aspects, origin of ingredients, production and processing details, environmental aspects, ethical considerations (such as child labour, animal welfare), packaging details storage and use conditions and shelf life. Freek van Eijk also demonstrated that the application can be personalised, i.e. information most relevant to the consumer will appear first on the smart phone. He clarified that the possibilities to present information are in fact almost endless. New information items which could be considered include: the carbon footprint of the product and a sustainability index. However, the provision of information about such complex aspects will not be the starting point of the project. It will start with relatively non-controversial simple information, followed by gradually more complex issues. It is an incremental process that steers itself. A copy of the Caesar presentation is attached to this report as **Annex 4**.

Mr Van Eijk further emphasised that all participating food producers and retailers should reserve a web service which will provide all information in the context of the project. With this web service a system will be implemented which can access the database of the food producers and retailers. FITI will provide the necessary software for this and, if needed, will assist producers with the installation of the system.

Several speakers stressed that the information provided by electronic means must be additional to on-pack labelling and, currently, cannot replace the food label. On the spot information remains crucial. Especially low income consumers (who more frequently than others eat unhealthy, high energy food) do not necessarily have a smart phone or a home computer. Scanners in shops would help to overcome this. Concerns were also expressed whether all info would be included or only beneficial information. Herman Koëter explained that the project aims at making informed choices. It does not aim at making healthy choices, but it will make it certainly easier to make such choices. He further said that the information provided would be neutral and factual: it will absolutely not be limited to positive information but also address aspects of the food seen by many consumers as negative (such as the use and function of chemical food additives).

8. Practical experiences

Ms Goyens of BEUC recommended that tests with consumer panels should be carried out as these help to identify consumer preferences for information by analysing specific consumer reactions to information (both lay-out and content) that is tested on them. Mr Vermeulen of Coca Cola and Mr Schreiber of the German BVL presented examples of the use of electronic means to present information to consumers. In the Netherlands and Belgium Coca-Cola has an on-line platform that provides information about where a product is bottled. Coca-Cola is exploring what else it can do to provide information to consumers and welcomes the project. Key notions for Coca Cola are: information should be science-based and adequately substantiated. It is contemplating how applications such as the FITI app would fit into a broader mix of information.

Mr Schreiber said that three months ago consumer's organizations in Germany, supported by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, started a website where consumers can complain about product information (www.lebensmittelklarheit.de). Producers have the opportunity to publicly respond to the complaints. As a result many products have been changed. In October 2011 German food safety authorities launched a website to inform the public about unsafe or misleading food products according to Article 10 of Regulation (EC) 178/2002 (www.lebensmittelwarnung.de). In order to get any new warning targeted to the consumer, the Twitter option has been included, RSS feed and email-newsletter subscription are planned. He also explained in what way items sold on the Internet are controlled. All producers that are selling food products on the Internet must comply with the EU and German Food Laws. A short PowerPoint presentation of Georg Schreiber is attached to this report as **Annex 5**.

9. Process – incremental provision of information

Mr Madelin mentioned that the technological possibilities for communication are exciting and can help meeting questions in society and that we have to learn by trying and failing. He added that using rough fast information is often better than waiting until one knows all details. Today, one in five citizens uses IT tools to help moving toward healthy behaviour. He outlined two directions:

- Linking-up: Understanding people's motives to go on-line. Asking those who use IT what make them do it;
- Applications should allow for personalised use.

10. Stakeholder dialogue now needed

The initiative aims at a broad stakeholder endorsement throughout the EU, from business as well as governments, NGOs and academia. Mr Schilpzand described the process of a 4-rounds on-line dialogue in which all participating stakeholders are involved, thereby making use of the process of crowd sourcing. This dialogue process includes: mapping (identify the areas of consensus and debate), mining (collecting the information of as many stakeholders as possible) and co-creating (making syntheses and generating new ideas). Four concrete steps can be identified in each round:

- mobilize experts to take part in the discussion, e.g. by using social media;
- establish a scientific base for the dialogue and generate intermediate reports from the dialogue, making use of a scientific moderator/reporter;
- make use of a dialogue moderator to maintain focus;
- do a reality check by means of visualizing intermediate results and executing consumer research.

Each dialogue round would take at least 2 months of discussion on the dedicated website, based upon a high level (e.g., CEO, DG) interview and subsequent expert comments. This phase is followed by approximately 2 months of collating proposals and suggestions, narrowing these to draft conclusions that finally will be adopted by the initiative's Advisory Committee. Finally the results will be published for stakeholders use and understanding of the broader public.

The PowerPoint presentation of Rutger Schilpzand is attached to this report as **Annex 6**.

Mr Koëter indicated that it is the aim of the project to include as many brands and products as possible. He expects that once it has shown to be successful for a number of brands and products others will follow: the message the consumer will see when scanning a product of a non-participating

brand (something along the lines of: ‘additional information about this product has not been made available by the producer’) may be another incentive to participate.

11. Interest and support

All speakers and a considerable number of attendants expressed interest and support for the FITI project. Ms Liotard referred also to the interest of Members of the European Parliament in the FITI. Ms Goyens, Mr Madelin, Ms Nikolakopoulou, Mr Schreiber, Ms Stoelhorst, Mr Vermeulen and Mr Wall are pleased with the project and expressed their wish to stay informed, and/or expressed willingness to actively participate and contribute. Ms Goyens mentioned in her video message that BEUC will closely follow the developments of the project but cannot actively participate because of its limited staff and many tasks. However, since BEUC is keen on extensive consumer input into the project, input of national consumer groups will be sought. Mr Madelin is pleased that this experiment is going on.

12. Next steps – how to proceed

The Chair of the meeting, Dr Josephine Wills invited Mr Madelin to explain possible financial support for this initiative from the Commission. Mr Madelin indicated that The EC has formal procedures for financing projects/initiatives. He said that if the FITI project would be considered a non-public undertaking, it would be closer to the market which involves a market-based financial sustainability – e.g. via advertising and paying membership/subscription. Such a business model has demonstrated to work well for organisations such as Which? (a UK consumer organisation). However, if the FITI project would be considered a public-private partnership or consortium, meeting a research goal, it could, as a technology platform, apply for EU funding through the Framework Programmes.

The chair of the project, Herman Koëter declared that the initiators of the FITI project will bring together all parties showing an interest and give equal value to all involved. He informed the meeting that the Board of the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) has welcomed a dialogue with the FITI initiative. The slogan of one of the resolutions approved at the Forum’s meeting last July reads: “we will provide transparent, fact-based information that will help the consumer and shoppers to make informed product choices and usages”. Taking into account that this statement is almost literally the same as one of the objectives of FITI, the Project Team is comfortable that close cooperation with the CGF can be achieved.

As the next step, a Platform of Partnering Stakeholder (PPS) will be established to further the FITI project and give guidance to it. Mr Koëter explained that the project will be managed as a non-profit activity. However, there will be a need for financial support to cover the costs of meetings, web discussions, expert dialogues, software development, etcetera. At the first meeting of the Platform of Partnering Stakeholder a budget estimation for the first year will be put on the table for discussion and comments. He suggested the following budget division, which will be open for discussion: 50-60% private, 10% NGO, 20-30% Public and 10% Project Initiators.

13. Stakeholders Platform Meeting of the FITI Initiative

Herman Koëter invited all attendants to communicate their wish to participate in the project to the project leaders as soon as possible and announced that the first Meeting of the FITI Platform of Partnering Stakeholders (PPS) will be held in Brussels on 28 February 2012.

ANNEX 1

PROGRAMME 21ST CENTURY CONSUMER FOOD INFORMATION: IT'S COMING!

18 November 2011, Résidence Palace, Rue de la Loi 155, Brussels

12:30-13:00	Reception with drinks	
13:00-13:05	Introduction of the Chair, Dr Josephine Wills; Opening	Herman Koëter and Josephine Wills
13:05-13:30	Project concept and overview	Herman Koëter, Orange House Partnership
13:30-13:35	The importance of modern food information to the consumer	Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, DG SANCO
13:35-14:20	Caesar showcase: smart phone food information	Freek van Eijk, Caesar Experts
14:20-14:50	S&P showcase: online stakeholder dialogue	Rutger Schilpzand, Schuttelaar & Partners
14:50-15:30	Reflections from society (5 minutes each):	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dutch Ministry of Health: Inge Stoelhorst • German BVL: Georg Schreiber • Member of the European Parliament: Kartika Liotard • Coca-Cola: Wouter Vermeulen • BEUC: Monique Goyens • University College of Dublin: Patrick Wall 	
15:30-15:50	Discussion/ exchange of views	Josephine Wills EUFIC
15:50-16:00	Key note take-home address	Robert Madelin, DG INFSO
16:00-16:10	Next steps: how to proceed, who's with us	Herman Koëter, Orange House Partnership
16:10-16:15	Closure	Josephine Wills, EUFIC

16:15-17:30 Networking cocktail

ANNEX 2

21st Century Consumer Food Information: it's coming!

Brussels, 18 November 2011, 13:00-17:30

FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organisation
Cees Vermeeren	a.v.e.c.
Susanne Döring	AIBI
Katrin Recke	AIM - The European Brands Association
Georg Schreiber	Bundesamt für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit
Esther Bijl	Bureau Brussels
Friso Coppes	Bureau Brussels
Jasper Ronda	Bureau Brussels
Lodewijk Buschkens	Bureau Brussels
Matthies Verstegen	Bureau Brussels
Rudolf Douque	Bureau Brussels
Wouter Vermeulen	Coca Cola
Peter Wijnen	de Boordschapper BV
Emilie Van Heuverswijn	Delhaize Le Lion
Stephen Pugh	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Sabine Seggelke	DSM
Olivier Mouton	ECR Europe
Josephine Wills	EUFIC
Chiara Tomalino	Euro Coop
Sonja Van Tichelen	Eurogroup for Animals
Alexandra Nikolakopoulou	European Commission
Robert Madelin	European Commission
Kartika Liotard	European Parliament
Paul Skehan	European Spirits Organisation - CEPS
Andreas Varlamos	FOOD ALLERGENS LABORATORY
Erick Schydowski	FoodShopper
Dr. Mark Lohmann	German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment
Robin Goossens	GS1 Belgium & Luxembourg
Ulrich Adam	Hill & Knowlton International
Gijs Kurth	HPA
Elias Wästberg	IKEA



Nico van Belzen	ILSI Europe
Franz Kraus	Kraft Foods
Heijnen, Dionne	Kraft Foods
Inge Stoelhorst	Ministry of Health of the Netherlands
Philippe Pittet	Nestlé
Fer Palasthy	Officia
Rudolf Tale-Yazdi	Online Software AG
Herman Koeter	Orange House Partnership
Kees de Winter	Orange House Partnership
Marlou Heinen	Orange House Partnership
Tony Scheerboom	Orange House Partnership
Corine van Lingen	Permanent Representation of the Netherlands
Nicole Kleuskens	PS in foodservice
Popa Ana Maria	Romanian Permanent Representation to the EU
Hugo Byrnes	Royal Ahold
Ad Nagelkerke	Schuttelaar & Partners
R. Schilpzand	Schuttelaar & Partners
Hans Baaij	Stichting Varkens in Nood
Jos Veldhuis	Supermet
Tim Werkhoven	Tesco
Dr. Ludger Fischer	UEAPME
Helen Benson	UNESDA
Christiaan Prins	Unilever
Truus Huisman	Unilever
Patrick Wall	University College of Dublin
Han de Groot	UTZ CERTIFIED
Hille Meetsma	Vodisys Medical Software
Hans Kraak	Voeding Nu
Ralf Hartemink	Wageningen University / Food-Info Foundation
Colum Joyce	C360



ANNEX 3:

PowerPoint presentation of Herman Koëter, Orange House Partnership, Belgium

ANNEX 4:

PowerPoint presentation of Freek Van Eijk, Caesar Experts, The Netherlands

ANNEX 5:

PowerPoint presentation of Georg Schreiber, BVL , Germany

ANNEX 6:

PowerPoint presentation of Rutger Schilpzand, Schuttelaar & Partners, The Netherlands