

CONANX Work Package 5: Food Manufacture, Retailing and Health

This work package aims to examine how regulatory concern to address the saturated fat content and energy value of foods through product reformulation has changed the practices of food manufacturers, retailers and consumers. The approach taken seeks to interrogate the proposition that consumer concerns are mediated by changes in food manufacture, retail and policy (and vice-versa). In particular the research will consider how attempts to reformulate food products have been enacted in product innovation and how the consumer is conceptualised in these processes.



The uncertain level of public worry over the amount of saturated fats and sugar present in foods (Miles *et al*, 2004; Kirk *et al* 2002; FSA, 2008) suggests that attempts to articulate and deliver advice on appropriate nutritional intakes and dietary habits to individual consumers may not connect with everyday food practices. As a senior representative of a major food manufacturer noted, “People eat food, not policies...don’t annoy the consumer”, illustrating that the relationship between policy interventions and the manufacture and retail of food is mediated by conceptualisations of the consumer.

The main research questions the work package seeks to address are:

- How has the policy approach towards the saturated fat content and energy value of foods been developed and why have particular styles of intervention been adopted?
- How have food manufacturers and retailers been involved in the development and application of the policy approach?
- What forms of expert advice and knowledge have been utilised in order to instigate changes in the saturated fat content and energy value of foods?
- What has been the impact of reformulation upon the development of particular food products and how have production practices changed? How has innovation been promoted or impeded? How have manufacturers and retailers differentiated products on the basis of lower saturated fat contents and energy value?
- What have been the implications for suppliers at different points of the supply chain?
- How has the consumer been conceptualised during these changes?
- Is concern over saturated fat and energy value reflected in public anxieties over food and how have food practices changed as a result of intervention?

Methods

Phase 1 involves semi-structured interviews with civil servants, managers and technical specialists from food manufacturers and retailers, food / consumer NGO representatives and experts on the food sector. In addition, this phase will also involve reviewing relevant policy documents and legal instruments.

Phase 2 involves three case-studies of particular food products developed in response to the reformulation imperative discussed above. The case-studies will be selected for comparative analysis.

Phase 3 involves interviews with consumers and application of Q methodology. The interviews will explore attitudes towards food and health and will draw upon the case-studies developed in Phase 2.

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