

# **UK TARGET NUTRIENT SPECIFICATIONS (TNS) FOR MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS USED IN SCHOOL MEALS**

## **SUMMARY NOTE**

### **Introduction**

Voluntary TNS have been developed for a range of manufactured foods used in school meals to assist caterers in meeting wider nutrient based standards for school meals. Using products that meet these TNS should help to bring young people's intakes of these nutrients through school meals more into line with current dietary advice.

The product categories covered by TNS largely reflect those already in use in Scotland as part of their school meals policy 'Hungry for Success'. The specifications themselves take those in use in Scotland as a starting point, and also take into account the range of products currently on the market.

### **Background**

In England, the White Paper 'Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier', published in November 2004, announced the Government's intention to revise the current nutritional standards for school lunches and to consider introducing nutrient-based standards. Subsequently, an independent School Meals Review Panel was established to develop minimum nutritional standards for primary and secondary schools in England. Their report, 'Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food' was published for consultation, by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in October 2005. These new standards aim to deliver a reduction in pupils' consumption of fat, salt and sugar, and an increase in the consumption of fruit, vegetables and other foods containing essential nutrients.

Scotland already has weekly nutrient-based standards for school meals as part of their school meals policy 'Hungry for Success'. In Wales, as part of the whole school approach to food and nutrition, the Welsh Assembly Government will be consulting on Appetite for Life at the end of June which sets out proposals for a consistent and coherent approach to driving forward improvements in food and nutrition in schools, and in particular for more stringent nutritional standards for school meals. In Northern Ireland, food based standards have been piloted across primary and post-primary school meals. These are currently being evaluated and revised in line with developments across the rest of the UK.

To support these processes across the UK, a programme of work to set TNS for manufactured foods used in school meals was announced in February 2005. The Food Standards Agency has developed these specifications,

which were published for consultation on 26 July 2005. After due consideration of all comments received, the TNS have now been finalised. This note provides background on the publication of TNS for manufactured foods used in school meals across the UK.

### **Why have UK TNS been set? What is covered?**

These specifications have been designed to help procurers and caterers of school meals meet standards for school meals currently in place, or being developed, across the four UK countries. They also provide a benchmark for manufacturers reviewing product ranges or considering reformulation. The TNS are not intended to define what should comprise a school meal or 'recommend' particular product types for use. The broad product categories are intended to cover the majority of products in use. There may, however, be categories of products that are not covered by the TNS. The fact that no TNS is established for these products does not mean that these products cannot be used. Similarly, the categories used here are not intended to limit development of new products to these categories alone. However, should manufactured foods covered by these TNS form part of a school meal, the use of products that meet these specifications would help caterers of school meals meet wider school meal standards.

By definition, these TNS are concerned with the nutrient content of manufactured foods used in school meals and not other aspects such as quality or frequency of use. These are, or will be, considered separately as part of the development of national standards for school meals.

### **How are TNS intended to be used?**

The TNS may be used as a reference tool by caterers when selecting products to use, or by schools or other authorities in defining the products they wish to be used. Their use is voluntary.

### **What are TNS and how have they been set?**

TNS have been set for the maximum levels of total fat, saturated fat, total sugars and salt for a number of categories of manufactured products (such as baked beans, sausages and burgers) which are used in school meals across the UK (per 100 grams, as served). In addition, minimum protein levels have been set for certain products to help ensure an adequate protein intake when pupils select vegetarian options. The product categories covered are based on 'Hungry for Success' to provide consistency with those existing specifications.

The specifications themselves are also based on those already in place in Scotland through 'Hungry for Success'. They take into account both the specifications of products currently available for use, the Agency's wider work

on salt reduction and comments received from a range of stakeholders in response to the consultation process. These included trade and sector associations/organisations, manufacturers, suppliers, caterers, local authorities and public health organisations.

### **How do they fit into wider work on school meals, and on salt reduction?**

TNS form just one element of work on school meals. The four UK countries, whilst having distinct policies towards school food, continue to work towards improving food provided during the school day. Standards for school food are important as they provide a benchmark for which schools and caterers must meet. However, it is equally important to develop wider practical measures to help schools and caterers interpret and implement such standards. This includes for example developing the skill-base of caterers through for example training on healthier eating and catering practices. TNS also forms an element of this wider work and will prove a valuable and practical tool to help caterers and schools to develop healthier and balanced menus.

Separate, but related, work is ongoing to develop salt targets. These salt targets were launched for consultation on 1 August 2005 and the final salt targets were published in March 2006. The wider salt targets and the TNS set for salt in manufactured foods used in school meals are intended for different purposes. The TNS are for products used specifically in school meals (and therefore consumed largely by children), whereas the wider salt reduction work applies to specified product categories in whatever form they are available to the consumer.

### **Next Steps**

These TNS will contribute to wider work on improving school meals currently underway by DfES, and will be taken forward and used as a tool across the four UK countries to support wider national standards for school meals being developed, or in place. The evaluation of their use in schools by caterers and procurers of school meals, will be, or is being considered as part of this wider work to improve school meals.

The UK TNS are published, together with the wider school meal standards produced by DfES which they support, as an integrated package to help improve school meals. In Scotland, where TNS already exist, dissemination will be through a revised 'Hungry for Success'.

We are planning to review the TNS two years after their publication. This review will consider the specifications of products available at that time and any other developments in school meals relevant to the specifications. For example, product categories appearing on the market or no longer in use. Where necessary, we will propose and consult on revisions.