The Hungarian regulatory experience regarding TFA reduction

Miklós Szócska

Director, Semmelweis University - Health Services Management Training Centre

former Hungarian Minister of State for health

Hungarian behaviour and TFA consumption

- In 2011 Hungarian mortality was 130.000 people that included 25% coronary disease mortality. According to evidence published in the New England Journal of Medicine the TFA related mortality is between 6-19% i.e. **2000-6000 lives/year could be saved by reducing TFA below a safe level.**
- Children are high risk group of population.
- 2009-11 National Institute for Food and Nutrition studies showed high TFA levels in many products
  - 100 (17%) of 652 products had higher than 2% TFA content
  - 38 (7%) of 652 showed higher than 10 g TFA/100 g fat content of the food
  - In many cases these were basic components of later processed food products

Hungarian behaviour and TFA consumption

- In 2016 The Hungarian food basket was leading the charts of the comparative 16 country research:
  - 42 gramms TFA – 60% of it coming from fast food restaurants
- In 2009 the repeated study showed an improvement:
  - 12,5 gramms – popcorn, cookies, wafels
- A 2009 National study by National Institute for Food and Nutrition showed the following minimum to maximum TFA intake
  - Adult men had 5,5 mg to 6,7 g daily intake,
  - Adult women had 6,3 mg to 7,5 g daily intake.
- In worst case scenario when the citizen consumes the worst margarin products the daily TFA intake critically falls over the WHO recommended acceptable TFA level (<2 g), and still falls over the 5 g/day level where the risk of cardiovascular diseases shows a 25% increase!
- Due to the Hungarian public health crisis and consumer and industry behaviour (includiing the seasonal production of chocolate products) needed urgent regulatory intervention

The regulation

- The regualtion concentrates on oils, fats, including emulsions with fat in their original forms or as components of processed food for humans.
- The natural trans fats occuring in animal food products do not fall under the regulation.
- It is forbidden to sell food products that have more than 2g TFA in 100 gramms of the total fat contents. It is the responsibility of the producer to register fodd components that they use during processing or production

The regulation – international examples

- Regulation in Canada, Denmark, Austria, New York proved provide examplary results
- Hungary introduced the regulatory aspects following international best practices

Reflections

- The 2010-14 Hungarian public health regulations covered a broad agenda
  - Due to the public health crisis in mortality and morbidity of non communicable diseases
  - Non-smoking regulations
  - Public Health Product Tax – taxing added salt and sugar
  - Introduction of HPV vaccination
  - Piloting and introduction of national screening and public health programmes
  - Introduction of community based public health agencies
- Most difficult of them all was the TFA regulation
  - Lobby power of industries involved
  - Industry reasoning of investments needed or slowing down the process caused lot of unavoidable morbidity during the prolonged preparations
  - EU food registration regulation follows open market labeling disciplines and completely negates public health aspects – this way EU food labeling can be identified as one of the causes of inability for public health interventions

To do's identified by the Ministry in 2014

- Public health campaign for the population
  - Introduction of international best practices and achievements: Canada, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, USA (New York and Philadelphia), Argentina, India, Iceland
- Public health negotiations with developing industry behaviour
  - Introduction of New York restaurants' case study to decrease TFA prevalence from 50% to 2%
- Further food labeling attempts
- Making relevant TFA information available
- Control and research TFA in products