

START OF A NATIONAL CHOICES PROGRAMME

10-04-2014

General guideline

Introduction

In this document an overview is given of the steps that could be taken to start a national programme to implement the Choices logo and its criteria. Taking national differences and the character of the stakeholder environment into consideration, this stepwise approach is not prescriptive but aims to serve as a guideline and *aide-mémoire*.

The Choices International secretariat is ready to support, as the organisation has lots of experiences in this field.

Inventory of support

- Formation of small initiative group, with members from:
 - o food & Nutrition science;
 - o food industry (brands and retail);
 - o opinion leaders or NGOs if relevant.
- In addition: observers from government (Ministries involved, mainly Health and Agriculture).
- Feasibility inventory:
 - o Food legislation: do the current food labelling regulations allow the use of such a front-of-pack logo . Note that it can be perceived as a nutrition claim and therefore has to comply with the rules in this field.
 - o Sufficient support from scientists from academia, preferably from the following fields: nutrition, food technology, consumer behaviour.
 - o Interest from a number of companies, preferably brands and retail.
 - o Availability of national food composition database.
- One-on-one meetings with key stakeholders to identify and create support. Sequence: Ministries, scientists, public health organizations, industry, NGOs.
- Workshop with interested parties from industry, government, science, NGOs.

If there is sufficient support: start organisation and find funding for the initial stage.

Building the organisation

- Formation of a National Scientific Committee in cooperation with the Choices Regional Scientific Committee.
- The National Scientific Committee should discuss the applicability of the Choices international criteria to the

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local situation.

- Check and, if needed, adapt product group definitions, delete unnecessary product groups and add new ones. Ask comments/input on proposed criteria from interested industry (e.g. set up industry advisory group for scientific committee).
- Note: keep the number of product groups as low as possible. Take into consideration the role of products in daily menu and technical differences between food compositions. Introduction of new products groups needs substantiation from the European Scientific Committee.
- Discuss and, if needed, adapt the nutrient criteria in each product group.
- Reality check of criteria, using a national database of nutrient composition of available food products. The Choices criteria should be applicable and at the same time select about 10 to 20% 'best in class' products of each product group.
- Formation of a legal entity (Foundation) including governing Board and secretariat. Preferably the Board should have an independent chairperson (e.g. former politician or minister) and should consist of representatives of participating organisations and companies (brands and retail, small and large companies). As Choices focuses on the frontrunners in the food industry, Board membership of individual companies is given preference over representation by trade organisations.
- The Board should decide on the funding structure. Food companies that want to use the logo should become paying member of the organisation. Therefore a fee structure has to be developed, preferably related to the size of the company, e.g. based on the company's annual turnover.
- The Board selects an independent and credible assessment and certification agent.
- Notification of the programme and Foundation to the government and discussion on cooperation with government in fields like consumer education and support in health oriented food innovation, especially for SME.
- Introductory workshop for industry; use of compliance tool to see which products comply with the criteria.
- Launch dedicated programme website.
- Industry participation, signing of participation agreements with individual companies. Note: for a sustainable start, a contract lasting at least 3 years is advised.
- Science: do a baseline study on consumer purchasing habits, consumer attitude to healthy foods, easiness to select healthier options etc., in order to monitor impact after introduction of the programme.

Running the programme

- Selection of Choices compliant products that apply for the logo, by independent assessment and certification agent.
- Distribute Choices Style Guide in order to assure the correct use of the logo (lay out, size, colours).
- Add logo to the packaging of compliant products of member companies.
- Sign affiliation agreement of the national Foundation with Choices International.
- Launch programme, including press action.
- Start consumer communication.
- Monitoring & evaluation of progress of the foundation, number of products, communication and consumer attitude.
- Let independent scientists carry out impact studies.
- Continue acquisition to attract more brand manufacturers, retailers and caterers to join.
- Find ambassadors to promote the programme.
- Set up annual market control of products with logo in cooperation with independent certifying agent.