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Press Release

Nutrition and public health: The strengthened role of the food processing industries in public health problems

Paris, 6 April 2016 – The prevalence of conditions partly related to diet, such as obesity (the worldwide prevalence of which has doubled since 1980¹), but also diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, certain cancers, etc., is growing constantly. Facing this trend, the food Industry is increasingly involved in the search for solutions. Alcimed, consultants in innovation and development of new markets, is looking into the positioning of food industries against the public health issues link to nutrition.

Faced with the public health nutritional issues, the food processing industry is confronted by ever greater social and regulatory demands

The WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health², adopted by the WHO World Health Assembly in May 2004, recognises the role played by private players, and more particularly the food industries, in public health industries and is encouraging companies to continue their efforts. In fact, nutrition and health problems have become key issues for many food industries. Thus they are showing a willingness to take an active role in resolving these issues and responding to demands from the public authorities.

For example in France, as part of the French National Nutrition & Health Programme (PNNS) launched at the start of the 2000s, **charters for voluntary commitment to nutritional progress³ have been signed** with the French Ministry of Health by food companies or brands, such as Kiri, Fleury Michon, Quick or Maggi. Nutritional optimisation of foods (reducing the content of sugar, salt, fat, saturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids, etc.) now takes an important place in the specification for designing the new products of industrial companies involved in this approach.

Another demand is based on mandatory nutritional labelling of food products, making it possible for the consumer to read the energy value and fat, protein and salt content. **European labelling rules have been revised** recently with the INCO regulation, which will come into force for all products from December 2016⁴. Discussions are still in progress regarding 5-C (5 colours) food labelling put forward to the government in 2014 by Serge Hercberg⁵. This system, which makes it possible to include traffic lights on the packaging of certain products, is considered stigmatising and has raised a lot of criticism from industrial companies. Certain distributors then proposed their own labelling system, such as Carrefour's system based on frequency of consumption⁶.

*"It also consists of responding to behavioural changes by consumers. They are tending increasingly to **make informed nutritional choices** and to demand nutritional quality in the products they consume, which is leading the food industry to modify their products to meet these new expectations",* says Mathieu Dublanchy, Alcimed Project Manager.

Adapting formulations, labelling, connected distributors, unusual and strategic partnerships – Opportunities for the food industry are coming out of this nutrition-health background

The most traditional response to these demands is to change the product formulation and labelling.

¹ Cf. WHO, [Fact sheet 311](#), updated January 2015

² Cf. [WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health](#)

³ Cf. French Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, [Signatories of Charters of Commitment to Nutritional Progress](#), 11/12/2015

⁴ Cf. [Web page](#) for the French Directorate General for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Repression of Fraud, 23/04/2015

⁵ President of the PNNS and one of its principal initiators, Serge Hercberg is also Professor of Nutrition in the Faculty of Medicine at Paris 13/INSERM and coordinator of the French *NutriNet Santé* study

⁶ Cf. Que Choisir article [French consumer association], ["Food labelling – Carrefour off-track"](#), 26/09/2014

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For example, on its web site Nestlé proposes reducing the salt and fat content of the products in its Maggi and Herta brands⁷, while Bel is communicating about the results of its voluntary commitment to nutritional progress in the Kiri brand⁸. For McDonald's, the INCO regulation regarding nutritional information has been the opportunity to put forward a new more visual information system⁹, also as part of the nutritional progress approach.

However, beyond these first responses, opportunities are arising for the food industries. Some are even making the response to the new nutritional issues their flagship, displaying their willingness to be 'part of the solution and not the problem' (see Danone¹⁰ example), particularly by means of innovation. For others, this is the chance to be positioned on new products. For example, in the United States in December 2015 PepsiCo launched its Hello Goodness¹¹ initiative, offering 'healthier' snacking products (fruit juice, oven chips, ready-to-eat humus kit, etc.), through connected distributors. The distributor also supplies the consumer the nutritional information for products on a digital screen, and suggests combinations of products for different times of the day. For PepsiCo it collects data providing a better understanding of consumers' preferences and desires, to adapt the future product range, still as part of a nutritional improvement policy.

For some companies, it can also mean new opportunities through partnerships for innovative initiatives. For example, Nestlé was able to launch a partnership with Google (YouTube) called the Maggi@ Diaries¹², a televised series presenting the journey by 4 women to various countries in the Middle East, each episode showing culinary discoveries, ideas for healthy recipes and nutritional tips.

Thus, the active role that the food industries are taking in nutrition and public health issues is an essential driver for innovation and the development of new products and initiatives.

Strategic partnerships between food-processing industries and pharmaceutical companies

Certain food products are already officially recognised as playing a role in improving health: they are called functional foods, nutraceuticals, health foods, etc., in order to reinforce their contribution to public health issues; an increasing number of companies has sought to promote the nutritional and health claims for their products¹³. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) oversees these claims strictly by imposing, since 2007, a detailed scientific assessment, supplemented since 2012¹⁴ by a restrictive list of generic claims that can be used.

In response to increasingly restrictive requirements, food-processing companies are their healthcare capabilities. Firstly in-house, by re-directing their R&D, such as by setting up nutrition-health centres (cf. Cargill, Nestlé, Danone, BEL, etc.). But also through partnerships based on increasingly-advanced technology, such as the link between Danone and pharmaceutical companies Sanofi-Aventis and Mérieux since 2011, as part of IRT LyonBioTech.

"This trend makes it possible to imagine, in some longer term, strengthening strategic alliances between food-processing companies and healthcare business, whether pharmaceutical companies or start-ups", concludes Thomas Paschal, Director of the Alcimed Food-processing Business Unit.

ABOUT ALCIMED

Alcimed (www.alcimed.com) is a consultancy company in innovation and development of new markets, specialised in life sciences (healthcare, biotech, food processing), chemistry, materials and energy, as well as aeronautics, aerospace, defence and Public Policy. Alcimed counts on a team of 180 employees, sub-divided by sector and able to handle extremely varied missions from marketing & sales subjects (market surveys, targeting

⁷ Cf. Nestlé site <http://www.nestle.fr/nutrition/leschartespnssigneepamosmarques>

⁸ Cf. Bel – Kiri communication on [the results of signing the charters for voluntary commitment to nutritional progress](#), 2013

⁹ Cf. [New McDonald's nutritional information system](#)

¹⁰ Cf. [Interview with Nicolas Gausserès](#), Danone Nutrition Director, Down to Earth, 16/05/2013

¹¹ Cf. PepsiCo [Press release](#), 14/12/2015

¹² Cf. Nestlé page [Maggi@ Diaries](#)

¹³ Cf. EFSA, [Nutritional and health claims](#)

¹⁴ Cf. Regulation (EU) 432/2012, dated 14 December 2012

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new needs, positioning a new product, etc.) to strategic issues (development strategy, research & assessment of acquisition targets, organisation of an activity, design/assessment/deployment of public policies, etc.). The company's head office is in Paris and it also has offices in Lyon and Toulouse, as well as in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, England and the United States.

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