

The European Vegetarian Union (EVU) is the voice of the growing number of Europeans choosing vegetarian and vegan products over animal-based nutrition. Its aim is to make vegetarian and meat-reduced lifestyles safe for consumers, producers and traders and provide adequate information on related health issues, as well as on plant health, animal health and welfare and environmental protection, with reference to a vegetarian lifestyle. The EVU is also the organisation backing the V-Label (www.v-label.eu), a voluntary certified labelling scheme. The EVU is registered in the Register of Interest Representatives (No. 109356110578-03).

Position Paper · October 2014

For a Fair and Inclusive School Milk Programme

This is to comment on the Commission proposal on the European school milk scheme (COM(2014) 32 of 30 January 2014) on behalf of the European vegetarian movement and to suggest amendments to the draft Regulation.ⁱ

The EVU welcomes that the European legislator is engaging in improving the health of young adolescents and future generations. Promoting healthy nutrition in schools and other educational institutions through the school milk and school fruit scheme is an important way of educating children about nutritional health impacts.

However, some aspects of the programme could still be improved regarding the inclusion of certain groups of people, product ranges and information provided.

Therefore, we invite the European Legislator and the Commission

- **to include plant-based milkⁱⁱ in the school milk and school fruit scheme, in order to make it possible for everyone to take part in the scheme, and**
- **to implement suitable educational programmes that are based on scientific knowledge on healthy nutrition and geared to current agricultural standards.**

School Milk Scheme for Everyone

At present, many people cannot benefit from the school milk programme and are excluded.

It is to be welcomed that the European Legislator and the Commission demonstrated flexibility in the product list and included lactose-free cow's milk for those who are lactose-intolerant. Lactose-

intolerance is a common food intolerance, with a prevalence ranging from two per cent of the Scandinavian public to 70 percent in Sicily. Lactose-intolerance is, in fact, the norm rather than an exception in several parts of Europe and even more so worldwide.

However, lactose-free milk is not an alternative for many who prefer natural products and/or cannot get used to its particularly sweet taste.

According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), cow's milk protein is a common cause of allergic reactions in childhood and approximately one per cent of the children living in Europe suffer from cow's milk allergy.

Furthermore, a growing number of people decide not to use animal products in their lives, for ethical, health or environmental reasons. This applies in particular to young people who should be reached by the school milk and fruit programme. There are, for example, numerous types of diets people choose according to their convictions. Vegans neither drink milk nor consume any other animal-based product. Ovo-vegetarians refuse milk and various other animal products.

In general, more and more people want to make individual everyday choices about what they eat or drink, based on their knowledge. This trend goes hand in hand with efforts of the Union's policy, like extensive food labelling, to enable consumers to make informed choices on what they buy.

Integrating all these different people into such programmes, and thus giving them the chance to participate in governments' actions for health improvement by putting plant-based milk on the product list, would be a forward-looking approach and a commitment to empowering the European public to pursue of lifestyles of their choosing. Otherwise the aim of the programme cannot be reached.

Plant milks, such as soy, oat, spelt, rice and nut drinks, can be similar to cow's milk in its nutritional composition and are used for exactly the same purposes, for example as a breakfast drink or baking and cooking ingredient. They are natural and healthy alternatives for everyone, especially for those currently excluded from the school milk programme.

Providing Suitable Information within the School Milk Programme

It is to be welcomed that the European Legislator and the Commission want to support young adolescents in healthy eating habits with "educational measures, such as school visits to farms and teaching nutritional basics".ⁱⁱⁱ It has to be ensured, though, that the educational contents represent reality. The public's image of today's agricultural production methods is often distorted. That is why the children should visit farms that are the main suppliers of the dairy market and eventually the milk they get in school.

Furthermore, there is still little education on nutrition and health at schools. The school milk and school fruit scheme provides a perfect opportunity to fill this gap. It represents a chance to inform

young people about the advantages and disadvantages of certain food products and the current scientific cutting edge in health and nutrition.

Plant Milk and Sustainability

Article 11 TFEU requires all Union policies to take into account environmental concerns. That includes food policy, which increasingly looks at the sustainability of the food chain. Plant-based milk has an ecological advantage over cow's milk. Cows have to ingest more energy and protein than their milk eventually contains, as they need a good share of it for their own metabolism. Thus, a great deal of plant protein and energy is lost in the course of cow's milk production. Plant-based milk can directly be extracted from plants, making it part of a multi-pronged approach towards more sustainability in the food chain and less food waste.

ⁱ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/milk/school-milk-scheme/index_en.htm

ⁱⁱ The commonly comprehensible and routinely applied term "milk" is used here for plant-based beverages, though the legally applicable term would be "drink".

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140723IPR53545/>