

Euro Coop Position on Trans Fatty Acids (TFAs)

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Introduction

Coronary heart disease is one of the leading causes of mortality in Europe, with an estimated 14% of deaths being due to cardiovascular diseases (CVD). Studies have shown a correlation between consumption of partially hydrogenated vegetable fats, popularly called trans fatty acids (TFAs), and an increased risk of CVDs. So much so, that **the consumption of TFAs increases the risk of heart disease more than any other macronutrient**.

In order to prevent these risks, it is advised to consume foods that contain **less than 2g TFAs per 100g** of fat. The majority of foodstuffs sold on the EU market contain less than 2g TFA per 100 g of fat. However, there are notable exceptions such as biscuits or popcorns which may contain more than 40 g of TFA per 100 g of fat.

Although the EU average consumption of TFAs is not alarming, certain groups are at risk of consuming higher amounts of TFAs than advised, and are therefore at an increased risk of developing CVDs.

Initiatives undertaken by Euro Coop members to limit TFA consumption

The core co-operative value that distinguishes consumer co-operatives from other retailers is that consumers are not only customers, but also owners.

Therefore, consumer cooperatives have a strong focus on Social Responsibility and favour a sustainable approach towards the activities of production and distribution taking into account the sustainable development of local communities, environmental concerns and the health and safety of consumers.

To this aim, Euro Coop members have launched several initiatives aimed at reducing the consumption of TFAs among the EU population. These initiatives generally aim either at **informing the consumer** about the presence or absence of TFAs in certain foods, or at **reformulating products** so as to minimize their TFA content. Particular attention is given to **own brand products** which present an additional guarantee to consumers as to the care that is given to formulate that particular product.

For instance, in 2009 our **Spanish member Eroski** decided to **remove trans fats from their own brand products** given their negative effect on cardiovascular health. Products which do not contain trans fats can be identified by consumers with the following message: "*without partially hydrogenated vegetable fat*".

Similarly, **Coop Italy** has **removed the use of hydrogenated fats** – which are an important source of trans fatty acids – from the recipe of own brand products.

Our Finnish member S Group has limited the content of trans fats in their own brand products to a maximum of 2g per 100g.

Coop Sweden encourages the [consumption of organic foods](#) given its many beneficial effects, one of which being that they do not contain chemically produced trans fats.

A need for EU wide regulatory action

Euro Coop welcomes the [report](#) adopted by the European Commission regarding trans fats in foods and in the diet of the Union population. Also, Euro Coop is delighted to be given the opportunity to contribute to this issue via a **public consultation**.

This report not only highlights the health threat represented by trans fatty acids, but also introduces four possible means to address TFA consumption in the EU. These key possible means are the following:

- The EU introduces mandatory TFA content declaration;
- The EU introduces a legal limit on the TFA content of food;
- Voluntary agreements towards reducing TFAs in foods and diets are made at EU level;
- No further action towards reducing TFAs in foods and diets is taken at EU level.

Due to the undeniable negative effects of TFA consumption on the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, Euro Coop calls on the European Commission to take **mandatory EU wide regulatory action**. This type of measure would limit market fragmentation within the EU, and it would have the advantage that food business operators are legally obliged to comply with it. Indeed, voluntary measures have not always proven to be effective in this domain.

In addition, studies have shown limited consumer awareness and understanding of TFAs. Therefore, and in line with the report, Euro Coop agrees that the most effective measure would be that the EU introduces a **mandatory upper legal limit on the TFA content of food**. Such a measure would benefit the EU in multiple ways: improvement of citizens' public health, reduction of deaths from heart disease, tackling of inequalities in health across and within EU member states, and saving healthcare costs.

Therefore, Euro Coop welcomes that the European Commission intends to carry out a **fully-fledged impact assessment** in order to minimize the impacts on specific products and producers, as well as the risks of unintended consequences.

Conclusion

Given the strong correlation between TFA consumption and the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases, Euro Coop recommends that EU wide regulatory action is taken in order to limit the consumption of TFAs in the European market. Specifically, and in line with the European Commission report, Euro Coop recommends introducing a **mandatory upper legal limit on the TFA content of food**. Euro Coop hopes that the impact assessment that will soon be launched by the European Commission, together with the effective collaboration between the European Commission, Member States, and stakeholders, will amount to a rapid resolution of the health threat represented by over-consumption of TFAs in the EU.

About Euro Coop

Euro Coop is the voice of the co-operative retailers in Europe. Our associations brings together the national associations of consumer co-operatives in 19 European countries, which represent 4,500 local/regional cooperatives, employing 500,000 citizens across Europe and operating 36,000 stores which serve 32 million consumer-members daily. Euro Coop's members together are Europe's strongest retail force – accounting for € 76 billion in annual turnover from sales.

Euro Coop's Secretariat in Brussels represents the interests of its members before the European Institutions and facilitates the inter-member exchange between the national associations. More information is available at www.eurocoop.coop.

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