



Making the healthy option available

Food project

Fighting Obesity through Offer and Demand

Currently, the favourable effects of regular physical activity and a healthy diet are no longer under debate. Physical activity and a healthy diet have been identified as particularly important in counteracting the development of chronic diseases, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers⁽¹⁾. Despite strong evidence, the majority of the adult population in most countries do not meet the recommendations for physical activity and diet⁽²⁾.

The causes of this are numerous, and included among the list are increases in automation and labour-saving devices that have resulted in a change in the way we live and work. Many workplaces are now sedentary settings and often provide easy access to energy-dense food and beverages. As a result, workplaces are contributing to the epidemic of many severe chronic diseases.

On the other hand, promoting healthy and balanced nutrition in the workplace can bring benefits to companies and their workers⁽³⁾.

The workplace setting offers several advantages: 1) a substantial number of the working population can be reached easily; 2) many people spend more than half of their waking hours at work; and 3) multiple levels of influence on behaviour can be targeted, such as health education and increasing access to healthy food and physical activity.

(1) WHO (2004): Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.
 (2) DG SANCO and WHO/Europe (2010): Implementation progress report of Strategy for Europe on nutrition, overweight and obesity related health issues.
 (3) Mozaffarian, D. et al. (2012): Population Approaches to Improve Diet, Physical Activity, and Smoking Habits.

‘It is often difficult to have a proper healthy meal at lunch time during the working day. The food offered around workplaces can lack variety or be of poor nutritional content.’

Though employer rationales vary, health promotion programmes may yield economic benefits in terms of, for example, reduced absenteeism, employee health care costs, and employee turnover⁽⁴⁾.

In the **White Paper** on Nutrition, Overweight, and Obesity-related health issues adopted by the European Commission in 2007, workplaces are highlighted as important settings for health promotion: *‘Businesses can also support the development of healthy lifestyles in the workplace. Together with employee organisations, they should also develop proposals/guidelines for ways in which companies of different sizes can introduce simple, cost-effective measures to promote healthy lifestyles.’*

(4) NICE public health guidance (2008): Promoting physical activity in the workplace.

‘The EU employment rate for persons of working age (15–64) was 64.2% in 2012. This means that in 2012, 216.1 million persons were employed in the EU.’

Eurostat

To deal with the growing need for effective workplace interventions, the 28-month FOOD project was launched in 2009. FOOD aimed to introduce simple, cost-effective measures promoting a healthier lifestyle for employees by addressing both demand and supply. Therefore, on one hand, FOOD looked to increase the awareness and capacity of employees to make healthier choices, but it also focused on the nutritional quality of food offered outside the working place. The consortium was based on a public-private partnership coordinated by Edenred (formerly called Accor Services) and represented experts from academia, public authorities and nutritionists from six European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Spain and Sweden).

To meet its objectives, FOOD has completed five complementary sets of actions set by the expert panel.

The inventory

The project started by reviewing the existing interventions promoting balanced nutrition in the workplace and restaurants. Seventy programmes were identified and inserted into a consolidated inventory. In analysing these previous programmes, serious concerns were raised; lessons can be summarised as follows: 1) experts found that in most interventions evaluation as well as dissemination were weak; 2) due to the lack of a proper assessment of the knowledge of participants and the low level of presence of professionals in the consortium, unsuitable tools were created; 3) finally, sustainability was also an important but unresolved issue in most cases.

The inventory was further enriched with the findings of the Move Europe programme which has led to a second consolidated inventory.

Understanding needs and benefits

Desk research was followed by two surveys. The first was a quantitative survey mailed to 52 000 employees and 5 000 restaurants to better understand their needs and expectations. The second was a qualitative study, which involved conducting 60 interviews in restaurants.

A total of 4 529 employees and 399 restaurants responded to the questionnaires. Given the cultural differences between the participating countries, detailed results were presented in separate country reports. However, common findings can be summarised as follows. Half of the employees declared that a list of restaurants close to their company which offer balanced food, and nutritional information sent by email, would be the best way to raise their awareness about a nutritional programme. Employees also stated that they need practical and easily understandable information. On the other side, restaurant owners were eager to meet their customers' demand, with 44% of them being aware of this new demand

for healthier food. However, only limited resources are available in terms of time and budget. Chefs also welcome suggestions and believe that they have a role to play; but no 'revolution in their kitchen'.

Recommendations

Following the analysis of the results from the inventory and questionnaires, recommendations were made by the partners. Discussions led to the compromise of having common recommendations in all countries when possible, and specific national ones where appropriate. This resulted in the formation of six common European recommendations for the employees and only one common piece of advice for the restaurants. At national level, the purpose was not to invent new recommendations but to use national guidelines when available and to adapt them to the objectives of the project: giving employees the means to access a balanced lunch break meal and for restaurants to propose it on their menu.

Common Recommendations for Employees

- *Taste the food before adding salt and/or other condiments.*
- *Lower the use of fat and preferably use vegetal oils.*
- *Eat at least five portions of fruit/vegetables per day.*
- *As a dessert, choose a fresh fruit-based option and sometimes as an alternative, a dairy product.*
- *Choose types of cooking that do not add too much fat (steaming, roast, grill, etc.).*
- *Choose water to accompany your lunch.*

Common Recommendation for Restaurants

- *Favour cooking methods such as steam, oven or grill.*

Developing the tools

Nutritional recommendations were translated into a wide range of tools for informing employees and food providers about a balanced and healthy diet. Tools ranged from regular items like posters and leaflets to in-depth information. Guides, videos, on-site training sessions, a blog and websites, an online cooking game, an e-learning DVD for chefs, certificates and window stickers for restaurants, meal vouchers, inserts, and a smartphone application were all developed for this purpose. A geo-localisation tool further enables people to look for a FOOD restaurant near their office or home. Tools are available via the project website in nine languages.

Overall, approximately 4 million employees representing more than 160 000 companies and almost 200 000 restaurants were reached in the six countries with one or more communication tools within the project period. Moreover, face-to-face visits, email communication and pilot studies in three countries (Belgium, Czech Republic and France) resulted in a strong network of nearly 1 800 restaurants following the FOOD recommendations.

Ongoing work

FOOD has successfully managed the often difficult transition from a co-funded project to a self-sustained programme. On 14 December 2011, 23 partners signed a new Consortium Agreement about the continuation of the FOOD programme and took on board two additional countries: the Slovak Republic and Portugal.

Findings and outputs of the FOOD project were disseminated very intensely during the project period as well as after the project was finished. The project was launched to the public in October 2009 with a very successful road show. The campaign 'kicked off' with a double-decker bus travelling to all countries involved, passing through Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Prague, Milan and ending in Madrid. During the road show, seminars were organised on healthy food, nutritional advice, cooking demonstrations, measurement of body mass index, uses of an overweight stimulator and quizzes and tests about healthy food. This has generated significant media interest. Moreover, FOOD has been presented at more than 50 scientific conferences since 2009. Dissemination is still going on, for example in 2013 FOOD was presented at the 10th World Summit ECOCITY from 25 to 27 September and at the 20th International Congress of Nutrition which took place in Granada from 15 to 20 September.

In December 2012, all results and outputs of the FOOD project were compiled into a final publication. Given the cultural diversity of the participating countries, separate chapters are dedicated to each country in the 204-page-long report. The publication also presents the transition from a co-funded project to a self-sustained programme. The entire document can be downloaded from the project website.

FOOD in numbers in 2013

- approximately 6 million employees;
- more than 200 000 companies;
- 430 000 restaurants;
- network of more than 2 876 FOOD restaurants.

Deliverables

FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- project leaflet in English and French (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Annex_10_a_leaflet_of_presentation_en.pdf);
- online cooking game available in seven languages and in different levels according to the cooking skills (<http://game.food-programme.eu/>);
- online FOOD restaurant finder (<http://www.food-programme.eu/en/restaurant-finder-153/restaurant-finder>);
- blog, Facebook page and national websites.

FOR EMPLOYEES

- calendar about fresh fruits and vegetables for the four seasons available in seven languages (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Calendar_of_Fruit_and_Vegetables_Sweden.pdf);
- guide / leaflets / cards / posters for employees based on the main FOOD recommendations and practical advice available in different languages (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Poster_for_companies_Belgium_nL.pdf);
- shopping list including the main FOOD recommendations and practical advice for Belgium (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Annex_52_Belgium_shopping_list.pdf).

FOR PROFESSIONALS (i.e. CHEFS AND RESTAURANT OWNERS)

- certificate and window stickers indicating the commitment to FOOD principles (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Certificat_FOOD_EN_A4.pdf);
- guide / leaflet;
- placemat in Sweden (http://www.food-programme.eu/slider_outils/Annex_47_Sweden_Tray_model_sheets.pdf);
- six 5-to-8 minute long videos produced in six languages with English subtitles and containing the following information:
 - national nutrition recommendations shown in a practical way;
 - cooking show and a few pieces of cooking advice presented by a chef

from each nationality, taking into account cultural differences;

- target audience: primarily professional chefs, but can be useful for housewives/husbands;
- available on the website (<http://www.food-programme.eu/en/tools/e-learning-dvd-128>) and also on YouTube.



Useful links

Website: <http://www.food-programme.eu/>

Blog: <http://blog.food-programme.eu/>

Partners

Main Beneficiary:

EDENRED SA
France

Associated Partners:

- Institut National de Prévention et d'Éducation pour la Santé - INPES (until 01/03/2009), France
- Università degli Studi di Perugia, Dipartimento di specialità Medico-Chirurgoche e Sanità Pubblica (UP), Italy
- STOB PLUS OS (STOP PLUS), Czech Republic
- Karolinska Institutet (KI), Sweden
- EDENRED BELGIUM, Belgium
- EDENRED FRANCE, France
- ACCOR SERVICES CZ SRO (AS CZECH REP.) (until 29/06/2010), Czech Republic
- EDENRED ESPAÑA, Spain
- ACCOR SERVICES ITALY SRL (AS ITALY) (until 29/06/2010), Italy
- RIKSKUPONGER AB (AS SWEDEN), Sweden
- Service Public Fédéral Santé Publique, Sécurité de la chaîne alimentaire et environnement - (FESOPH), Belgium
- Agencia española de seguridad alimentaria y nutrición, Spain
- Fundación Dieta Mediterránea, Spain
- Haute École Lucia De Brouckere CIRIHA, Belgium
- Institut Paul Bocuse, France
- EDENRED CZ (from 01/02/2010), Czech Republic
- EDENRED ITALIA (from 01/02/2010), Italy