

European soft drinks industry on track to meet commitment to reduce added sugars by 10% by 2020

Mid-term review shows significant reduction in average sugars from 2015-17

20 June 2019, Brussels: UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe has announced that it is on track to meet its voluntary commitment to reduce added sugars by 10%ⁱ by 2020. A mid-term evaluation – conducted by third party auditors GlobalData – found that the average sugar level in European soft drinks has been reduced by 11.9%ⁱⁱ from 2015-2017.

The soft drinks industry is the only sector to have officially committed to the EU's 10% added sugar reduction target by 2020 as laid out in its sugar reduction annexⁱⁱⁱ. The industry has now delivered on that pledge – accelerating the pace of its ongoing sugar/kcal reduction in soft drinks available to more than 500 million people across the EU.

Significant reductions in calories and sugar have been achieved across the sector's beverages since 2000. In delivering this latest reduction a comprehensive strategy was pursued of: changing recipes to reduce sugar in its drinks; innovating to develop new products with different sweetness levels; increasing the availability of small packs to support portion control and moderation; and promoting no- and low-sugar/calorie beverages to encourage consumer behaviour.

“As an industry, our intention has always been to remain ahead of both changing consumer tastes and evolving expectations. We recognise that many people across Europe are looking to reduce the sugar they consume – including in soft drinks – and we are focused on playing our part in helping create a healthier food environment. This latest milestone marks the positive progress and innovation underway, as well as our continued ambition to be a leading private-sector partner for the European Union that delivers on the commitments it makes,” said Tim Brett, president, UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe.

The commitment made by UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe at pan-European level has prompted several similar pledges at national level around Europe, with many involving public-private partnerships. Since this 10% reduction commitment made in February 2017 UNESDA has also removed all added sugar drinks from sale in EU secondary schools – maintaining its longstanding pledge to responsible marketing which saw all soft drinks removed from EU primary schools in 2006.

The pace of sugar and calorie reduction varies across Europe in line with different consumer acceptance of no and reduced sugar drinks and reflecting the role soft drinks play in the local diet.

The industry remains committed to furthering its efforts to help create a healthier food environment across Europe and encourages other sectors to join and accelerate the pace of progress through similar pledges. UNESDA will continue to monitor its progress using independent auditors and report on its progress.

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Notes to editors on UNESDA's sugar reduction journey

- The European soft drinks industry has achieved significant – and increasing – reductions in calories and sugar across its portfolio since 2000. In 2017 UNESDA Soft Drinks Europe committed to accelerate both speed and scale to reduce added sugar by a further 10% by 2020. This is an aggregate target across the EU, Norway and Switzerland.
- The industry focus on sugar reduction reflects the broader, global NCD prevention agenda being pursued by both the UN and WHO – including the WHO guideline recommending that adults and children reduce their daily intake of added sugars to less than 10% of their total energy intake.
- EU Ministers of Health acknowledged in their Council Conclusions of June 2016 that in order to maintain consumer acceptance and prevent consumers substituting for higher sugar alternatives, reformulation should be a gradual process.
- The sector recognises that consumer tastes are changing, and many people wish to reduce their overall sugar intake – including sugar from soft drinks. It seeks to work in partnership with EU institutions, the public sector, civil society and other food sectors to reduce overall sugar.
- The vast majority of calories in soft drinks are derived from sugar – so when the sugar is reduced, so are the calories. The sector has been reducing sugar since the 1970s when the first no- and low- calorie drinks were introduced. It offers great tasting products with absolutely no sugar or calories – the only food and drink sector to be able to do so.
- In 2006 we made broad commitments to the EU Platform for Action in Diet, Physical Activity and Health to reduce sugar and calories, and many initiatives have been taken at national and European level within the framework of this EU Platform. Since we made this latest 10% sugar reduction commitment, more than 13 EU markets have also announced sugar reduction initiatives in partnership with national authorities, contributing to the EU-wide target. This in addition the more than 10 national pledges already taken.

ⁱ Taking 2015 as a baseline

ⁱⁱ GlobalData monitoring based on aggregated data from 7 European markets comprising some 70% of the European total

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