



EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF THE TRADE IN DRIED FRUIT & EDIBLE NUTS • PROCESSED FRUIT & VEGETABLES • PROCESSED FISHERY PRODUCTS • SPICES • HONEY

20 July 2022

FRUCOM POSITION PAPER ON THE CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF THE EU SCHOOL FRUIT, VEGETABLES AND MILK SCHEME

FRUCOM welcomes this public consultation and the opportunity to provide comments on the review of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme.

FRUCOM represents the interests of European traders in dried fruits, edible nuts, processed fruits & vegetables, and processed fishery products.

We fully support the EU school scheme as a tool to promote healthy habits among the younger generations. Overweight and obesity levels in children are alarming: according to the WHO obesity report 2022, 1 out of 3 European children is overweight or obese. Unhealthy diets are among the risk factors. According to the 2021 Global Nutrition Report, fruit and vegetable consumption in Europe is around 40% lower, while nuts consumption is 70% lower if compared to the EAT-Lancet Commission recommendation for a sustainable and healthy diet.

In this context, the scheme is a great educational opportunity for children who not only can transfer healthy eating habits to their friends and family, but also instil positive behaviours which will pave the way to a healthier generation, capable of choosing healthy and sustainable nutrition for themselves and for their families.

Currently, the EU school scheme finances the distribution of fruit, vegetables, milk and certain milk products to schoolchildren, from nursery to secondary school, generally outside school meals.

Nevertheless, we think that the products should also be provided during school meals. It is exactly during the meals that children share that they are more encouraged to try new foods, following other children's behaviour.

Giving the children the possibility of eating the food together is also a reason why the products should always be ready-to-eat (e.g., already washed, cut, peeled). This makes both distribution and consumption easier for teachers and students while guaranteeing the appropriate levels of hygiene.

Among FRUCOM products are dried fruit, nuts and processed fruit and vegetables.

Dried fruit and nuts are ready to eat, easy to transport and do not need to be refrigerated. Dried fruits are generally very much appreciated by children due to their sweet taste. Respecting the recommended portions and frequency of consumption, dried fruit and nuts can constitute a healthy and balanced snack. The suggested serving size of dried fruit (30-40g) can represent one of 1 of your five portions of vegetables and fruit a day and it is a good alternative to increase diet variety. Dried fruit also provides minerals, vitamins, dietary fibre and antioxidants such as anthocyanins. Therefore, it has a significant nutritional value.

Nuts are recommended by most dietary guidelines as well, providing mono and polyunsaturated fats, vitamins, minerals, plant-based protein, dietary fibre and flavonoids. The health benefits of consuming nuts



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as a part of a healthy lifestyle are shown by a number of scientific pieces of evidence such as the PREDIMED study (PREvención con Dieta MEDiterránea) which suggests their protective role against cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, the study 'Nut Consumption and Risk of Cardiovascular Disease' from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, people who ate one serving of nuts five or more times per week had a 14% lower risk of cardiovascular disease and a 20% lower risk of coronary heart disease during the study period. This may be due to the fact that the unsaturated fats they contain can help lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol.

Walnuts are high in alpha-linolenic acid, and also contain linolenic acid. These essential fatty acids are needed for the normal growth and development of children (source: EFSA).

Other studies suggest that nuts may be helpful in the prevention and/or treatment of some chronic disease-related risk factors, having a positive impact on glycaemic and lipid metabolism, oxidative stress, and inflammation. This is particularly significant since the number of children with type 2 diabetes is rising. Both nuts and dried fruits (particularly, prunes) may help prevent osteoporosis.

As far as the distribution of canned fruit and vegetables is concerned, it could be a good opportunity for children to increase the quantity and the variety of the fruit and vegetables in their diet. Furthermore, canned fruit and vegetables have a nutritional value which is comparable to fresh products, if not higher in some cases. Many products on the market have a reduced content of sugar and salt (e.g., fruit packed in juice instead of syrup, vegetables packed in water instead of brine) and preservatives and additives are absent in many cases.

Finally, dried fruit, nuts and processed fruit and vegetables help manage supply out-of-season and of produce not grown in colder climates. Moreover, they are also easy to store and distribute and do not generate food waste.

