



NUTRISCORE IS THE PAST - EMPOWERING CONSUMERS WITH EDUCATION, NOT SUPERMARKETS WITH POINTS

Bruxelles, 13 Ottobre 2022 - Influence and control over European citizens' supermarket choices was the topic of a European Parliament debate today hosted by Spanish MEP Jordi Canas (Ciudadanos – Spain) and the think-tank, Competere.eu. Invitees from nutritional science, SME's and consumer associations discussed the Commission reform of front-of-pack (FOP) nutritional labelling with Euro MEPs on the theme of "Empowering consumers: FoP labellings reform: health, knowledge, liberties".

"Europe is based on cultural diversity, liberties, knowledge, and education. Science is moving in the direction of personalised diets. Your smart watch is linked to your fridge, your metabolism and the supermarket. This is a great revolution in nutrition, where research on DNA and genetics is leading us towards personalised diets. Nutri-Score is the past. It's a one-size-fits-all scheme that is the old Hegelian model where an elite group of scientists approve an algorithm that claims to be perfect and applicable to everyone. Yet, when political or commercial interests decide so, the algorithm can be changed, and grades for selective products can go from red 'E' to yellow 'C'." said Pietro Paganini, founder of Competere.eu

Health, and health-care is entirely personal and individualised, explained Professor Ramon Estruch of the University of Barcelona. People can suffer from hyper-tension, allergies, metabolic diseases, intolerances, genetic factors – all factors that can influence a person's dietary needs, as well as the effects of certain foods on their bodies, making them tolerant or intolerant to ingredients. Personal nutrition is the optimal path, and we're looking into individualised dietary recommendations for every citizen, with the assistance of AI programmes, he explained.

"Nutri-Score focuses on what is bad about a food. The algorithm calculates its grade, giving 40 per cent weight to the negative effects of a food, and only 15 per cent to the positive effects." Prof. Estruch explained.

This type of simplified scoring does not help people who may suffer from certain diseases linked to sodium, sugar, saturated fats or sugars, Prof. Estruch went on, because if an individual suffers from special dietary needs, what they need is information, to be enabled to make an informed choice, appropriate to their medical needs.

"Nutri-Score is simple, and too simple. It makes obvious mistakes" declared European Parliament MEP and rapporteur for the EU Farm-to-Fork strategy, Herbert Dorfmann. The question of what is healthy; how is that defined, and who or what entity defines what is 'healthy' for any given individual was a "tricky" issue for Dorfmann, particularly if such a simple system can force reformulation of recipes, in order to attain a better Nutri-Score.



MEP Dorfmann went on to recommend that Nutri-Score be evaluated for its result on effects on consumer health in those countries – France, Belgium, Germany – who have introduced the system into its national nutritional plan, before bringing it across Europe. Conservative think-tank New Direction, proposed that in the interests of personal liberty and personal education, the answer is free market competition. *“Why don’t we accept that multiple [nutritional] models exist and allow them to compete on an open marketplace instead?.”*, asked Robert Tayler. The opacity of the algorithm and the reality that Nutri-Score is a privately owned system lacking in transparency, is problematic, for MEP Dorfmann, because it gives supermarket distribution chains power that can be abused to influence consumer choice over decisions. *“It’s a system in the interests of the distribution system and that’s a problem.”*, Dorfmann concluded.

Representing small and medium-sized businesses in Europe, Veronique Willems of SME Europe highlighted the inherent burdens of reformulating product recipes to attain a better Nutri-Score, efforts that may not lead to increased customer satisfaction. SME’s are facing severe cost increases in the current financial crisis and often face discrimination and exclusion from supermarkets product lines. Nutri-Score makes many traditional, and potentially healthier, artisanal products look less healthy than reformulated commercial products, explained Ms. Willems, but the European Commission *“always needs to check with SMEs if the system they choose is feasible, because SMEs are providing food at the regional level”*.

“We have to support SMEs in Europe”, said Greek MEP Giorgios Kyrtos. *“They are facing pressures from inflation and energy prices. It is not the time to make their lives more difficult, and risk populism.”*

Consumer organisation SAFE declared *“SMEs are often not present in supermarkets, but supermarkets are not the future. We need to examine the whole food landscape, as we saw during the pandemic. Education is the key to allow consumers to make an informed choice.”*

The European Commission decision is now expected to present its proposal for a common European FOP nutritional label in early 2023, when Sweden holds the Presidency of the EU.

Read Competere.eu Manifesto to the European Union ([Link](#))

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