



News Release - FAU annual conference

Date: 13 November 2003

## **FOOD INDUSTRY, ADVERTISERS, MEDIA, CONSUMER GROUPS & GOVERNMENT BODIES JOIN FORCES TO PROGRESS THE ARGUMENTS SURROUNDING**

### **'CHANGING ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN'S FOOD'**

#### **Key findings from the Food Advertising Unit annual conference**

A major conference examining '*Changing Attitudes to Children's Food*' took place in London today (Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November).

Organised by the Food Advertising Unit (FAU), a centre for information, communication and research in the area of food advertising, the event saw representatives of the media, food and advertising industries come together with consumer groups and governmental advisory bodies to discuss the complex issues and examine possible routes forward.

Early on in the day David Kershaw, Partner, M&C Saatchi, in his examination of the **Relationship Between Marketing & Consumer Demand**, reassured delegates that 'no one in the advertising industry underestimates the seriousness of child obesity as a major problem and no one is in denial that the role of advertising will need to come under the microscope.' He observed that 'we absolutely do have to tackle the problem of child obesity but it will have to be by addressing the real and sometimes difficult multiple causes' and concluded by observing that 'all reason and evidence tells us that not only would (a ban) be ineffectual but it would merely be a smokescreen for a failure to tackle the real causes.'

Rosemary Hignett of the Food Standards Agency later spoke on the subject of the **Role of Government in Addressing Children's Diets**. She examined children's understanding of nutrition, the importance of school based initiatives and parental advice as well as central industry issues and potential regulations – for example labelling and claim controls. In particular she looked at dietary survey and public health data and the trends these have uncovered. In addition she raised the issues of fruit and vegetable consumption, vitamin and mineral intake and fatty acid, salt and sugar intake levels among children. She noted that 'Adults who maintain weight are more likely to exercise, eat less fat and refined sugars, have structured eating patterns, including breakfast and control portion sizes.'

Stephanie Valentine, Education Director, British Nutrition Foundation, presented the arguments and considerations from the educational establishment's perspective asking **Is Nutrition Education in Schools the Key to Improving Diets?** She discussed how food issues are currently addressed under the national curriculum as well as elaborating on practical initiatives to include and benefit schools, parents and the wider community.

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.../2 Changing Attitudes to Children's Food

In turn, Steven Watts, Managing Director, Scolarest, spoke on behalf of caterers about **The Secondary School Challenge**. He noted that 'the provision of a healthy and balanced school meals programme is more urgent today than it has ever been yet no one, including government, wants to pay'. He espoused the importance of producing an at school eating environment that appeals as well as creating 'evolution' rather than 'revolution' by introducing healthier foods alongside existing and familiar offers so kids can make choices.'

**The Role of Consumer Groups in Changing Children's Diets** was addressed by Ed Mayo, Chief Executive, National Consumer Council who agreed with the need for a sustainable and achievable solution and stressed the need for a fundamental nutritional shift.

Research into children's views on food, advertising, diet and healthy lifestyles were presented before a panel discussion to debate, **Who is ultimately responsible for the health of our children?** The panel included Dr Pat Spungin (Chief Executive Officer, Raisingkids.co.uk), Martin Paterson (Deputy Director General, Food & Drink Federation), Neville Rigby (Director of Policy and Public Affairs, International Obesity Task Force) and Katherine Cullerton (Dietician, Brent Primary Care Trust).

Jeremy Preston, Director of the FAU, comments: "The FAU welcomes the opportunity to hear differing views on this complex and multifaceted issue. We must not shy away from the problems and arguments but rather find workable solutions based on the facts."

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**Notes to editors:**

The FAU can provide you with access to a wide range of spokespeople and professional experts plus many briefing and background information materials.

**Food Advertising Unit**

The Food Advertising Unit (FAU), based in the offices of the UK Advertising Association is a centre for information, communication and research in the area of food advertising, particularly television advertising to children. In addition to the commission and publication of research, the FAU holds an annual conference and is an active participant in the debate surrounding children and commercialism. The FAU has also produced and widely distributed its ParentPower booklets, which are designed to help parents consider the commercial nature of the modern world, and how best to introduce their children to it. Further details about the FAU can be found at: [www.fau.org.uk](http://www.fau.org.uk)

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