

## **Consultation on Schools (Nutrition) Bill**

### **Question 7**

Advocates for Animals (Advocates) welcomes many of the proposals on nutrition and health promotion in Scottish schools, in particular the many references to fruit, vegetables and cereals.

It is of course essential that children are provided with all the essential nutrients which make up a healthy diet and it is imperative that the idea of healthy eating should be instigated in schools.

We would, however, like to ensure that vegetarian and vegan options are available to school pupils throughout Scotland. A well-balanced vegetarian diet closely matches expert dietary recommendations for healthy eating, being low in saturated fat and high in fibre, complex carbohydrates, and fresh fruit and vegetables (1).

The Consultation mentions that the provision of dairy milk in schools by local authorities is subsidised by the Scottish Executive. We suggest that this School Milk Subsidy Scheme should also provide an alternative to dairy milk. This could be one of a number of alternatives such as soya, rice or oat milk.

It is estimated that up to 15% of the population are lactose intolerant although many people are unaware they have this condition (2). In the last couple of years, the media have linked the consumption of dairy products to ovarian cancer, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, acne as well as causing problems with the digestion system, hormones, immunity and the cardiovascular system.

The School Milk project last year launched 'Milk Magic', an interactive education pack which encourages primary school children to drink dairy milk for its nutritional benefit. Advocates asks that a dairy milk substitute be supplied in schools not only for the possible health benefits associated with non-dairy foodstuffs but also for the welfare of the animals involved in the dairy industry. A dairy cow's life consists of being in a constant cycle of reproduction, normally using artificial insemination. She yields much more milk than she would naturally, which can result in serious health problems, and is kept indoors for six months of the year. When her calf is born she is only allowed to spend a few days with it before it is taken away, and the cycle begins again.

We are also concerned that the current advertising of dairy products could be rather misleading for children. The 'White Stuff' advertising fronts its posters with celebrities, and the new 'Naturally Beautiful' campaign from the Milk Development Council claims that drinking milk will make young teens attractive. We believe both these advertising campaigns could pressurise children into drinking dairy milk rather than drinking it out of free will.

Although there is no mention of encouraging children to eat meat in the Consultation, Advocates has concerns about the promotion of meat in primary schools. For example, Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is this year launching its 'Meaty Matters' campaign, similar to 'Milk Magic' in that it is an interactive education pack, which encourages children to eat red meat. Again, in the last couple of years the media have linked the consumption of meat with osteoporosis, bowel cancer, Crohn's disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

Advocates was concerned to see Meaty Matters publicity quoting the Chairman of the National Endorsement Team for Health Promoting Schools in Scotland as saying: "Health and diet promotions sometimes tend to focus on the requirement for fruit and vegetables when the emphasis should be on eating a nutritionally balanced diet from a variety of foods containing essential nutrients, including meat." We do not agree that the emphasis should be on a diet that includes meat, but simply on one that is nutritionally balanced.

Vegetarianism is now becoming increasingly popular as it recognised for its many health benefits. These benefits include reduced chances of suffering from heart disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, various cancers, diverticular disease, bowel disorders, gallstones, kidney stones, and osteoporosis. (2)

Not only are there health benefits associated with a vegetarian diet but by reducing our meat intake we are also decreasing our contribution to global warming, deforestation, desertification, water pollution and, most importantly, we are saving lives.

(1) <http://www.vegsoc.org/info/health1.html>

(2) <http://www.lactofree.co.uk/site/home.php>

Further reading:

*The Global Benefits of Eating Less Meat*

*Part One: Eating for Good Health*

<http://www.ciwf.org.uk/eatlessmeat/report/html/health.html>

*Achieving Access to Ethical Food: animal and human health come together*

Tim Lang, Department of Health Management and Food Policy, City University.

In *Animals, Ethics and Trade* ed Jacky Turner and Joyce d'Silva,

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