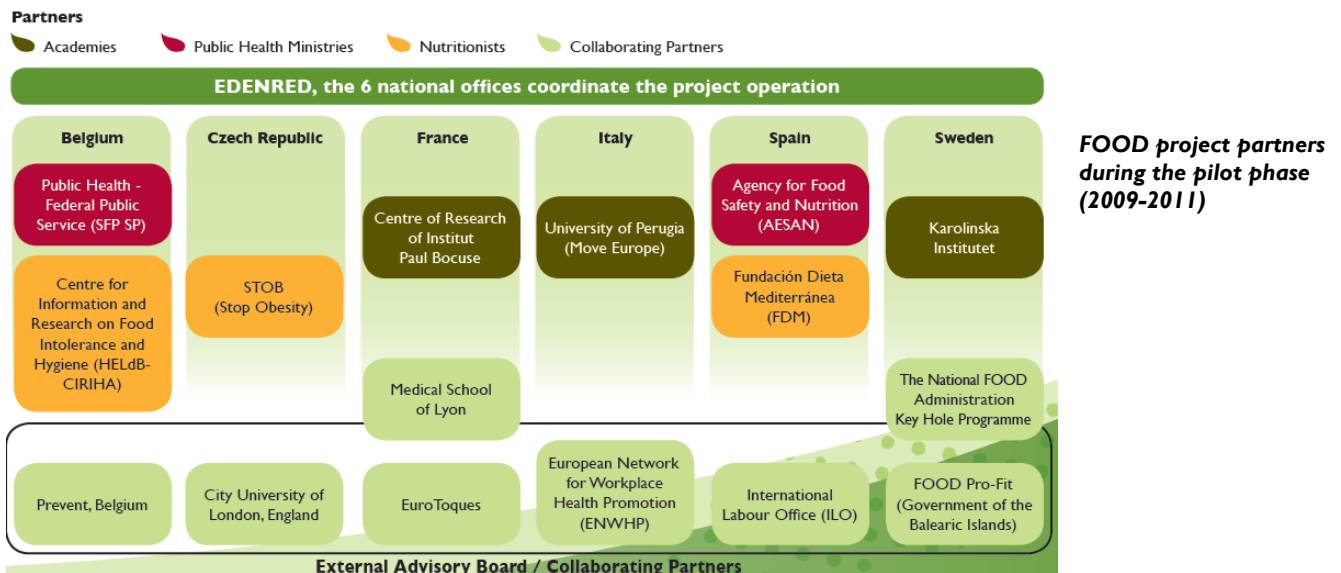


At the European Parliament, public and private sector players renew their commitment to combatting obesity

European nutrition and public health experts met at the European Parliament on May 31, 2011. They discussed employee eating habits during the work day and reviewed innovative, fun-to-use tools deployed by the European FOOD project to promote balanced nutrition to restaurant managers and employees. They also called for new partners with new expertise to join their consortium.

Organized as a public-private consortium and coordinated by Edenred, the FOOD project (Fighting Obesity through Offer and Demand) focuses on the growing problem of obesity in Europe. The project takes an original approach by addressing the business community directly – restaurant managers on one hand and company employees on the other. Experts from six countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Spain and Sweden) worked together for more than two years on ways of promoting balanced nutrition.



Following the completion of the initial pilot phase, the 25 initial public and private* partners presented their findings on May 31, 2011 and reviewed the **project's five stages**.

I – Conducting surveys of needs and expectations

Following an inventory of existing programs in Europe that promote balanced nutrition, two surveys were conducted in 2009:

- A quantitative survey involving two questionnaires – one for restaurant managers and the other for company employees – prepared by CIRIHA, the Belgian food hygiene information and research center, and the Institut Paul Bocuse research center. The surveys were carried out by Edenred in each of the six participating countries and the results were then analyzed in France by Institut Paul Bocuse.
- A qualitative survey of 45 restaurant managers in 12 countries.

The surveys highlighted **stereotyped opinions** about balanced nutrition held by both consumers and restaurant professionals. Respondents often felt that healthy food was more expensive as well as longer and more complicated to prepare; that it lacked taste and was similar to dieting; and that it was a passing trend rather than part of the culinary tradition.

Nonetheless, **a large majority of chefs (90%) recognized that they had a role to play**. In addition, one out of two restaurant managers expressed a desire for training and **44% felt that customer demand for balanced nutrition was increasing**.

II – Compiling recommendations from partners

Recommendations were prepared for **restaurant managers** to help them improve the nutritional quality of the dishes they serve, at no additional cost. These included: promoting cooking methods that use little or no fat (steamed, roast and grilled dishes) and not putting a salt shaker on the table (Belgium); systematically serving a carafe of water (France); offering two different serving sizes (Italy), expanding the offering of salads and raw vegetables, and in particular seasoning them with olive or grape seed oil (Czech Republic); clearly labeling the healthiest dishes on the menu (Spain); and using a tray model to inform diners about the components of a balanced meal (Sweden).

A number of recommendations were also made for **employees**. These included tasting food before adding salt and/or trying other condiments; reducing fat consumption and preferably using vegetable oils; replacing saturated fats (which increase the risk of cardiovascular disease) with unsaturated fats like olive oil to reduce lipids in the bloodstream; eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day; choosing desserts made with fresh fruit or, occasionally, a dairy product, choosing cooking methods that use little or no fat (steamed, roast and grilled dishes) and drinking water with meals.

III – Distributing tools to raise awareness

Various tools were developed to facilitate the deployment of recommendations that promote balanced nutrition to restaurants (chefs, managers and staff) or companies (employees). These included a pan-European website (www.food-programme.eu) from which tools can be downloaded free of charge, brochures, recommendation cards, certificates sent to affiliated FOOD network restaurants that commit to deploying the recommendations, a seasonal fruit and vegetable calendar,

inserts in Ticket Restaurant® meal voucher booklets and special events, such as games and cooking lessons.

In all, 85 communication initiatives were launched that helped to build awareness among 350,000 restaurants and more than 4,000,000 company employees.

IV - Evaluating pilot programs

In 2010, a second study was carried out involving the same 52,000 employees and 5,000 restaurants. In all 6,100 employees and 325 restaurants responded to two questionnaires prepared by Karolinska Institutet and Institut Paul Bocuse, which also analyzed the results.

Concerning employees, the survey found that **58% of respondents felt that they generally eat healthy**. As a whole, Spaniards, Swedes and Italians felt that they had a healthier diet than did survey participants in other countries. According to the 2010 survey, **75% of employees take a lunch break every day**, compared with 78.8% in the prior-year survey. However, body mass index estimates showed that 43% of the employees surveyed were overweight and in some cases obese.

Overall, **67% of respondents have lunch in a restaurant**. In Spain, the figure was 88%. Employees who do not have lunch on the outside generally gave one of three reasons: they bring their own meal from home, there is no restaurant or cafeteria near their place of work, or they don't have time to go out. **Quick service** is the main criterion when choosing a restaurant, followed by the variety of dishes on the menu and the restaurant's distance from the employee's workplace. Price ranks fifth in the order of priorities, followed by the nutritional quality of the dishes and meals served. The least important selection criteria are the staff's ability and availability to inform customers and help them choose and the presence of written nutritional information in the restaurant. Lastly, customers' first choice of what to eat **depends on their food preferences**, even if this criterion was slightly lower than in the 2009 survey. **Their second choice criterion** concerned the **nutritional balance of dishes and meals** served, which was mentioned by **39.3%** of respondents, **11.5% higher than in 2009**.

Concerning the survey of **restaurant managers, workers and employees made up the majority of customers (82.5%)** in all types of restaurant studied. Overall, 64% of restaurants offered a lunch formula (either a dish, full meal or special offer) and 57% featured a fixed-price menu. Among the restaurants surveyed, 24% have seen an increase in demand for (and sales of) nutritionally balanced dishes as well as more requests for smaller portions.

V – Developing the program and sharing best practices

Following the period during which the project received financing and support from the European Commission, which ended in April 2011, the partners decided to **continue the project**. New partners are expected to join the consortium in the near future. Slovakia joined the project in February 2011, via the National Public Health Authority and Edenred's national office.

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