

## EU FOOD LAW

### **Nutrition chief says isoglucose unlikely to be health risk**

**By Sara Lewis**

The head of the Commission's Food information and composition, food waste unit Alexandra Nikolakopoulou told MEPs last week that isoglucose consumption is unlikely to be a health risk once EU sugar quotas and restrictions end on 30 September.

Speaking to the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee Nikolakopoulou acknowledged that high intakes of isoglucose 125 to 150 grammes a day could have adverse health effects but argued that "this amount is highly unlikely to be consumed through a normal diet."

Nikolakopoulou pointed out that isoglucose offered "some advantages" for the food and drink industry, "apart from being cheaper" than beet sugar, liquid sweeteners had other properties for example not crystallising, so was mainly found in products such as drinks, confectionary and jams.

Nevertheless, Nikolakopoulou said that the Commission's health and food safety directorate general (DG SANTE) was carrying out a "comprehensive review" on consumption and intake of high fructose syrup (isoglucose), which it expected to publish at the end of the year. This prompted several MEPs to argue that the Commission should wait for the review before ending sugar quotas, although they recognised that it was too late now.

Danish Socialist Christel Schaldemose was among those suggesting that the Commission wait for the review, but realising it was probably too late asked: "Will you closely monitor the health effects from opening up the sugar market?" Schaldemose argued that the Commission needed to know about any adverse effects because "if we're going the wrong way we need to act fast."

Schaldemose agreed that if intake was only low there would be no problems but pointed to the US, where high fructose corn syrup was in half of the processed foods on the market. "Why wouldn't we see the same impact in the EU because it's easier to use in liquid form and cheaper."

The Danish MEP had opened her statement by saying "It seems stupid to open up [the market] for isoglucose in this liquid form when we know it's not healthy and when we know we already have problems with obesity in the European Union."

German Socialist Tiemo Wölken noted that the current quota meant that isoglucose had 5% of the market and allowed 700,000 tonnes a year and argued "we have got to deal with industrial production of isoglucose because the liquid is going to be used in the soft drinks industry." He stressed that it was 40% cheaper than sugar.

Calling for regulation, Wölken added that it was "not healthy" as it was "metabolised totally differently in the body to how sugar is metabolised" and can lead to diabetes.

Maltese Socialist Myriam Dalli pointed out that in some Member States conditions related to overweight and obesity eat up 10% of the health budget. "For me it is unacceptable that at this point in time we do not know what will be the impact of the sugar quota ending," she told the Committee.

Polish Conservative Boleslaw Piecha said that although in the US isoglucose had a generally recognised as safe (GRAS) classification, "it doesn't mean the consequences of excessive consumption is safe." He asked whether it would be possible to restrict its use by industry.

Austrian Socialist Karin Kadenbach reminded the Commission that Article 168 of the (Lisbon) Treaty on the functioning of the European Union requires EU policies to be consistent with the highest possible protection of human health. She warned that the Commission should be careful that Article 168 was not being infringed.

Coming back at the end Nikolakopoulou said that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was currently working on an opinion on the daily intake of added sugars from all sources, but "this will be a long exercise."

### **Producers deny sugar consumption to rise**

Isoglucose producer organisation Starch Europe has rejected the argument that sugar consumption will rise once quotas end.

In a position paper sent to *EU Food Law* in response to our [article](#) ahead of the Committee's discussion, Starch Europe states: "Because isoglucose and sucrose are used independently (i.e. isoglucose will only replace sucrose but will not be used in addition to it), Starch Europe expects neither a sudden increase in total sugars used by food manufacturers in the EU nor an increase in sugar production."

The position paper goes on to say: "The substitution of sucrose by isoglucose in food and drinks will not lead to an increase in calorie intake in Europe. Isoglucose has a similar composition as sucrose – they both consist of glucose and fructose, albeit in different proportions."

It adds: "Fructose present in isoglucose has the same properties as fructose present in beet sugar or naturally present in fruit or honey. All fructose is metabolised by the human body in the same way regardless of its origin."

According to Starch Europe there is no scientific evidence to support a causal link between fructose consumption and obesity. Instead as the World Health Organisation notes "the fundamental cause of obesity is an energy imbalance between calories consumed and calories expended."