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9D067

30 October 2019

Hon Tim Whetstone MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development
By Email: Minister.Whetstone@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Health rating of Cheese – Health Minister’s Minco

I am writing to you regarding aligning the Health Star Rating of Category 3D, cheese with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

As you will be aware the Health Star Rating System (HSR) was introduced in 2014 and gives a rating of “healthiness” to packaged foods. The dairy industry has been engaging with the government and stakeholders to ensure that all milk, cheese and yoghurt is recognised as healthy within the system.

For the past 2 years industry has been engaged in the 5-year review of the system and industry has been advocating to have the HSR score for yoghurt and cheese improved (to all score ≥ 3 star). The outcome has been achieved for all yoghurts, however 47% of cheese is still scoring less than 3 stars. This is not satisfactory. We are advocating improve cheese in line with other five-food group foods (as per Australian Dietary Guidelines), as cheese is a health food option for consumers.

The ministerial forum will meet in mid-November to agree on the 5-year HSR review recommendations. You, as well as each state and Territory representative will have a vote at the table. In conjunction with Dairy Australia and the Australian Dairy Product Federating, we are now seeking your support to have this important food elevated to a rating which reflects its value as a product which promotes good health and is proven to be so.

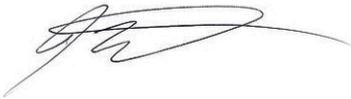
- The dairy industry is one of Australia’s major rural industries (third), employing over 42,000 people and producing \$4.3 billion in value. Each \$1,000,000 of turnover generates 8.56 jobs (FTE) in farms, processing and flow-on throughout the community. In South Australia 500 million litres is produced by the state’s 228 dairy farms.
- Australians currently under consume dairy foods and fail to meet their daily calcium recommendations. The current HSR ratings for cheese have the potential to further exacerbate this public health issue.
- A founding principle for the development and validation of the HSR algorithm was for all Five Food Groups (FFG) foods, as per the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) to receive a minimum of 3 HSR
- FFG cheeses remain at risk of not meeting this minimal hurdle of 3 HSR, even with further redefining and rescaling of category 3D dairy foods [part of recommendation 4D, May 2019 HSR Report, page 56]:
 - FFG cheese will score between 0.5-5 stars
 - Industry data shows 47% of FFG cheeses receive less than 3 HSR
- The dairy industry supports redefining and rescaling of category 2D dairy foods (i.e. dairy desserts and yoghurts) to improve the HSR with industry data indicating 98% of yoghurts in this category now score a minimum of 3 HSR.

- The dairy industry recommends FFG cheeses undergo more rigorous scaling to improve the star rating through modifying the back end of the HSR algorithm, with modelling then undertaken to assess and agree the final outcomes.
- The 'collated' recommendations from the HSR Report are yet to be agreed, and therefore modelling against industry data is required, before any HSR recommendations are agreed and finalised.
- The Heart Foundation new evidence-based guidelines on healthy eating, recommend full-fat milk, yogurt and cheese are now an option for healthy Australians.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further and would welcome the opportunity to meet ahead of MinCo.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Mr Andrew Curtis, SADA CEO.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Hunt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Hunt
President

CC: Minister Wade