

To the Chair of the Food Standards Agency, Dame Deirdre Hutton 19th September 2007

From:

Peter Melchett, Policy Director, Soil Association
Sally Bunday, MBE, Director, Hyperactive Children's Support Group
Kath Dalmeny, Deputy-Director, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

Dear Dame Deirdre,

Thank you very much indeed for your letter of 14th September in reply to ours of 7th September about the recent research saying that some food additives can have a negative effect on children's health and well-being.

We're very grateful to you for taking seriously the concerns we expressed, and for your detailed and considered response.

We look forward to hearing the discussion at your board meeting on Thursday, but given our continuing concerns about the way in which the agency responded to this research we would be very pleased to take up your offer of a discussion of these issues, and we will be in touch with your office to arrange a date.

We thought it might be helpful, nevertheless, to give you a very brief response to the key points you make in your letter, which we can discuss further when we meet.

We agree with you that the FSA have done a good job in funding this research, given your scientific advisers reluctance to accept the results of the earlier Isle of Wight study. But it was your willingness to fund this work to provide you with a definitive answer about the safety of these additives which makes the FSA's reaction to the findings all the more bewildering.

We think discussion about the timing of peer reviewing and publication is simply a smoke screen. We can see no reason why you did not simply allow the research to be published in The Lancet in the normal way. Then, after a reasonable interlude to allow people to study the findings, you could have arranged proper consultative meetings with a wide range of interested parties, and discussed those and the research conclusions with your Board in due course. Given that it's taken 5 years since the Isle of Wight study was published, the ridiculous rush, issuing an invitation on 3rd September to your public interest stakeholders for a meeting on 5th September is, frankly, unacceptable.

We also have some concerns about the role of the Committee on Toxicity, which we would like to discuss with you.

We're pleased to hear that you have asked the EFSA to consider the research "as a matter of urgency", and that you've asked the European Commission "to take swift action" once they have the EFSA's advice. However, we would like to explore with you why you have adopted what seems to us to be a very narrow and legalistic interpretation of your remit in respect of these additives. A position which contrasts not only with that adopted by DfES's School Food Trust and soft drinks in schools, but also with your own position when it comes to voluntary action by industry to reduce the intake, for example, of salt and sugar.

I hope these points will be helpful in indicating the issues we'd like to discuss with you when we meet.

Yours sincerely,



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