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From the Chief Executive,
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FOOD
STANDARDS
AGENCY

Sir Liam Donaldson
Chief Medical Officer
Department of Health
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9 October 2009

Dec Liam,

Folic acid and colorectal cancer risk: Review of the Scientific Advisory Committee's recommendation for mandatory folic acid fortification

On 9 October 2007 you wrote to Dame Deirdre Hutton, then Chair of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), requesting further expert advice from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) on potential adverse effects of folic acid on colorectal cancer risk. We discussed this issue informally when we last met on 29 June 2009. I am writing to advise you of the outcome of SACN's considerations.

A Working Group comprising of members of SACN, the Committee on Carcinogenicity (COC), and an external cancer expert considered a number of studies including *Cole et al (2007)*¹, *Mason et al (2007)*² and the confidential results of a meta-analysis of trials that had investigated the effect of B-vitamins (including folic acid) on cardiovascular disease, which also reported effects on cancer. The evidence was also considered by the COC.

SACN has concluded that the new evidence does not change their previous recommendation for the introduction of mandatory fortification with folic acid, with controls on voluntary fortification and advice on appropriate supplement use.

The attached report includes SACN's revised recommendations in full and further details of the considerations of the Working Group, the COC, and SACN. You will want to be aware that the report contains confidential unpublished information relating to the results of the B-vitamin trials, which needs to remain confidential until it is published by the researchers towards the end of this year. We will inform you once the publication date is known.

¹ Cole BF et al. Folic acid for the prevention of colorectal adenomas. *JAMA* 2007;297:2351-59.

² Mason JB et al. A temporal association between folic acid fortification and an increase in colorectal cancer rates may be illuminating important biological principles: a hypothesis. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2007;16:1325-29.



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Since SACN's advice regarding mandatory fortification has not significantly changed, the FSA's advice of June 2007 remains unchanged. I shall be writing to the FSA Board next week to inform them of the outcome of SACN's review of the recommendation for mandatory fortification with folic acid, and to advise them that no further discussion by the Board on this matter is required at this time. I would be happy to brief you on the advice agreed by the FSA Board in June 2007, which is attached for your information.

You will also want to be aware that SACN is planning to publish a summary of their advice to you on their website (www.sacn.gov.uk) on 19 October 2009.

I am copying this to Gillian Merron, Shona Robison, Gwenda Thomas, Michael McGimpsey, Dr Harry Burns, Dr Tony Jewell and Dr Michael McBride.

Best wishes

T.J.S.

TIM J SMITH