

# There's something healthy in the state of Denmark

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The people of Denmark are not only concerned about what they eat, but they are willing to pay more tax to eat healthier and make more informed eating choices. The results of this study come at a time when healthy eating and increasing rates of obesity are becoming a major concern for people the world over. Despite this concern, however, government policy actions have rarely been evaluated. The findings are an outcome of the EU-funded EATWELL ('Interventions to promote healthy eating habits: evaluation and recommendations') project, which has received EUR 2.5 million under the 'Food, agriculture and fisheries, and biotechnology' (KBBE) Theme of the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). EATWELL is looking into a variety of European policies aimed at reducing obesity and the lengths people would go to become healthy.

Data from the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) show that obesity is responsible for 10% to 13% of deaths and 2% to 8% of [health costs](#) in Europe alone. In the case of the United Kingdom, it is believed that the over-consumption of salt, sugar and saturated fats, combined with an under consumption of fruit and vegetables, are responsible for 70 000 [premature deaths](#).

These startling figures have led many EU Member States to design and implement a raft of policies aimed at encouraging healthier [eating habits](#) through the promotion of [fruits and vegetables](#), and at discouraging advertising certain foods to children. Other actions undertaken have included nutrition labelling, engaging with the food industry to improve

the composition of food products that are manufactured, as well as regulating public sector canteens to ensure healthy food offerings. While all these efforts are encouraging, what has been lacking for many of these policy actions is a proper evaluation done in a systematic manner.

Enter the EATWELL project that is investigating these policies over 36 months; the project is set to end in October 2012. In particular, it aims at reviewing the policy actions undertaken and at identifying gaps, success and failure factors for these campaigns. Its final objective is to provide EU Member States policymakers with best practice guidelines, and with valuable insights from private sector and communication agencies to develop appropriate policy interventions that will encourage [healthy eating](#) across Europe.

At a recent workshop to discuss the EATWELL results, it was revealed that consumers in Denmark were both more willing to eat healthier and pay more to do so. 'Danes have the most positive attitude towards economic interventions within the nutritional area, and are also willing to pay more to eat more healthily,' said Jessica Aschemann-Witzel from Aarhus University, Business and Social Sciences in Denmark, a doctoral student who worked on the project.

The EATWELL project partners evaluated more than 3 000 consumers from 5 European countries, asking them whether they were willing to accept 'national economic interventions to promote healthy eating habits'. Close to 36% of Danes responded they were prepared to pay more tax in return for policies to promote consumption of healthier food and more information on what constitutes [healthy food](#) (only 16% called for a tax reduction). When the researchers turned to the other countries represented in the study, the answer to the same question plummeted to 30% or less. For some specific measures, like increasing taxes to subsidise the price of healthy foods, the gap is even larger, with almost 42% of Danes being supportive, compared to an average below 29% in

other countries.

One reason for such a large difference is that the Danes have greater trust in their public institutions, the EATWELL partners found. 'Danes often have more faith in the public authorities and are used to paying high taxes, and therefore they are not as dismissive to changes in these areas as other populations,' commented Jessica Aschemann-Witzel.

The EATWELL consortium is focusing its efforts in reviewing the policy actions of Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom.

Provided by CORDIS

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