

New paper from Food Research Collaboration reviews impact of taxes overseas

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The UK Government must face the "mounting" evidence in support of taxes on unhealthy food and drinks, according to the authors of a new report.

The paper, published today by the Food Research Collaboration (FRC),

concludes that the growing [obesity epidemic](#) must be tackled by making unhealthy products with low nutritional value more expensive to reduce their consumption.

After reviewing evidence from six countries that have introduced taxes, the authors claim taxes can reduce purchases of food and drinks with high levels of fat, sugar and salt and raise revenue that could be targeted to fight obesity and related diseases.

Authors Dr Laura Cornelsen and Angela Carriedo say the need for diet changes is "beyond doubt" with obesity and diet-related diseases on the rise.

The FRC – a collaboration of bodies across the UK – is chaired by Professor Tim Lang, of the Centre for Food Policy at City University London.

Dr Cornelsen, a Research Fellow at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine who was invited by the FRC to write the paper, said: "Statistics on our health status consistently show that nutrition-related health in the UK is not getting any better, so it seems that whatever has been done so far is not enough.

"Measures such as taxes should be more seriously considered, as consumers do take prices into account when buying food. However, it's important not to have illusions that a tax alone will magically solve our nutrition-related health problems.

"While not a silver bullet, a well-designed tax has potential for positive health impact if implemented in combination with other strategies and policies that aim to improve our food environment, tackle obesity and nutrition related disease."

The paper aims to create a clearer understanding of the impact of taxes and uses preliminary evidence from Hungary, Denmark, France, Finland, Mexico and USA (Berkley, California). The authors say lessons should be learnt from overseas but stress the long-term impact of taxes on consumption is yet to be evaluated.

The report states: "While the current evidence is mounting, there are still considerable gaps in the knowledge and uncertainty surrounding the impact of such taxes."

The researchers also say work must be done to establish public opinion and support, while backing is also needed from politicians and the food industry, which is "strongly opposed" to the concept.

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at the Centre for Food Policy, City University London, said: "This paper provides a serious overview of food taxes, which is timely given the political delicacy about NHS budgets and pressures on healthcare from poor diets. Governments have for too long been in a fantasy world where cheap food is celebrated as a good thing, without including the externalised costs in the form of ill-health, rising healthcare costs and lost human potential.

"Food taxes may make politicians nervous but must be explored, not least because everybody pays in the end through NHS costs or lost quality of life. A lot of money is made in and from food, but too much of these money flows from consumers back down the chain are health-indiscriminate.

"We need a grown-up discussion about how the tax system could be reoriented to prevent ill-health. And this needs to be coupled with a sensible discussion about what a good [food](#) system should be for the 21st century. Ever more sugary, salty, over-processed foods is not the healthy direction."

More information: The paper is available online:
[foodresearch.org.uk/wp-content ... inal-20-May-2015.pdf](http://foodresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/inal-20-May-2015.pdf)

Provided by City University London

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