

Leading foods in the EU fall short of criteria for marketing to children

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Many food products sold across Europe fail to meet two sets of nutrition criteria developed to restrict marketing to children in the European Union, according to new research from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. The findings are published in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* on October 23, 2019.

Previous research has shown that marketing foods with high levels of fats, sugars, and salt to children is harmful to their diets. In response, the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe and the private-sector initiative EU Pledge have developed nutrient profile models that set criteria for deciding which [food products](#) are healthy enough to market to children. However, how leading products in Europe stack up against these criteria has been unclear.

To address this knowledge gap, Stefan Storcksdieck genannt Bonsmann and colleagues analyzed 2,691 pre-packaged foods sold in 20 EU countries, including breakfast cereals, yogurts, ready meals, and processed meats and seafood. Using nutrition data from Euromonitor International, the researchers evaluated how well each product performed against the WHO Europe and EU Pledge marketing criteria.

The analysis showed that 48 percent of the products were not eligible for marketing to children under EU Pledge criteria, and 68 percent were ineligible under WHO Europe criteria. The biggest factors contributing to ineligibility were high sugar levels in breakfast cereals and yogurts, high salt levels in ready meals and processed meat and seafood, and low

fiber levels in [breakfast cereals](#). Many yogurts failed to meet total and saturated fat criteria, and many frozen meals did not meet calorie criteria. Many of the products included in the analysis have a large market share, so children are likely to consume them even without [direct marketing](#) to children.

Though this study cannot provide insight into consumption or overall nutrient intake, the findings could be useful for monitoring and improving the [food supply](#).

The authors add: "Our study shows the need and scope for food product reformulation and innovation. Nutrition criteria can guide the process towards a food offer that makes healthy choices easier."

More information: Storcksdieck genannt Bonsmann S, Robinson M, Wollgast J, Caldeira S (2019) The ineligibility of food products from across the EU for marketing to children according to two EU-level nutrient profile models. *PLoS ONE* 14(10): e0213512. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0213512

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