

No to Overregulation of Drinks, Food Products, Fast Food and other Consumer Products

Background

Some interest groups are seeking regulatory measures from federal and provincial/territorial governments in order to discourage consumption or restrict sales or advertising of certain products. Specifically mentioned are energy drinks, carbonated beverages, chips and fast food.

Regulations sought by these groups include:

- a surtax on the product;
- limiting or prohibiting advertising;
- prohibiting sales of the product in specific environments (schools, hospitals...).

The federal government is specifically asked to enact labeling regulations, and to a lesser extent, possible surtaxes. Provincial/territorial governments are asked to act on advertising, surtaxes and trade restrictions.

These overregulation proponents have a simple strategy: blame the product for a serious health problem. For example, they say soft drinks increase obesity. According to this strategy, soft drink consumption must be discouraged to solve the obesity problem. Of course, it is a simplistic short cut, but some governments are sensitive to it. The same argument is used for chips, energy drinks and fast food.

Many scientific studies show that the obesity issue is much more complex and requires multiple measures. It cannot be solved simply by overtaxing beverages or other foods. According to a large-scale survey done by Ipsos Reid in 2011 for the Canadian Beverage Association, 89 per cent of Canadians think the government should foster behaviour change through consumer awareness rather than additional taxes.

Understandably, these products must be consumed in moderation. In this case, and many others, abuse has consequences. Most of all, it is important to encourage moderation, mainly through education. In 2011, The Canadian Beverage Association launched a voluntary initiative called "*Clear on calories*", which allows consumer to know *instantly* the caloric value of beverages. Also, in October 2010, Food and Consumer Products of Canada and Health Canada launched the *Nutrition Facts Education Campaign*, an educational campaign that gives Canadians the information they need to make informed food choices for themselves and their families.

Food and beverage producers or vendors agree with regulations based on scientific evidence, but they oppose discriminatory regulations that target a particular consumer product or merchant type by blaming it entirely for certain health problems. They are against overregulation. Regulations that are not based on science or on solid fiscal and economic principles will harm investments in and growth of the food processing and beverage industry, one of Canada's main employers.

Recommendation

That the federal government avoid over-regulating certain food products, including carbonated beverages and chips, in a discriminatory fashion, and apply to these products, based on scientific data, normal labeling rules in order to fully inform the consumer about nutrients and caloric value.