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## United Kingdom

### Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

## UK Proposal on Food Color Additives Exceeds Measures in the Rest of the EU

### 2008

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**Report Highlights:**

In a move that would put the UK at odds with its fellow EU Member States, the UK Government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) Board has called on the UK's food and drink industry to voluntarily remove a number of food colorings by 2009, citing a possible link to hyperactivity in children. In addition, it is calling for action to phase the additives out in food and drink in the European Union (EU) over a specified period. Industry reaction has been strong, describing the decision as bizarre. This is in part because the FSA's proposal goes beyond the recommendations of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which itself described the effects of the food colorings on children's behavior as small, and also because any voluntary UK ban would not apply to imports, including those within the EU. Meanwhile, consumer advocacy groups have cheered the initiative by the FSA.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
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London [UK1]  
[UK]

On April 10, 2008 at its monthly meeting, the UK Government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) Board discussed the possible effects of certain food colors on children's behavior and agreed to advise UK Ministers that there should be voluntary action by food and drink manufacturers in the UK to remove these colors by 2009. In addition, the FSA Board said there should be action to phase the additives out in food and drink in the European Union (EU) over a specified period.

The discussion took place following the publication last September of research into these colors by the UK's Southampton University and the review of the work conducted by European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which was published in March.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, in its review, EFSA said that the effects of the food colorings on children's behavior were small. The UK proposal exceeds measures in the rest of the EU and is over and above the Codex best practices standards.<sup>2</sup>

Dame Deirdre Hutton, Chair of the Food Standards Agency said, "It is the Agency's duty to put consumers first. These additives give color to foods but nothing else. It would therefore be sensible, in the light of the findings of the Southampton Study, to remove them from food and drink products. UK industry has already taken great strides to remove these colors from food; this decision builds on the work already done and will encourage industry to continue down this path."

The Board also discussed the Agency's advice on this issue. At present they recommend that cutting certain artificial colors from the diets of children showing signs of hyperactivity might have some beneficial effects. These colors are Sunset yellow (E110), Quinoline yellow (E104), Carmoisine (E122), Allura red (E129), Tartrazine (E102), Ponceau 4R (E124).

The Board's decision does not mean that there is an immediate ban on the use of these six colors in food and drink products in the UK. Rather, once the FSA has given its advice, UK Ministers will discuss this with other Government departments. These discussions will inform the UK's negotiating position in Europe on this issue. However, reaction from the industry and consumer advocacy groups has been swift.

Anna Glayzer, campaign coordinator at Action on Additives said, "We are delighted that the FSA has put its duty to the consumer first in their decision to recommend an EU ban, adding, "We will be keeping a close eye on industry to see what effect the voluntary ban has."<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) described the FSA decision as bizarre. Julian Hunt, FDF Director of Communication, said, "UK food and drink manufacturers are already taking these colors out of products, so we are surprised the FSA board feels it is an appropriate use of their powers to call for a voluntary ban."<sup>4</sup> Mr. Hunt indicated that UK industry have long been responding to consumers' demands for fewer artificial additives in food and drinks. He warned that a UK (effective) ban would be at odds with the rest of the EU as it would not apply to imports. He also added that there were a number of popular products where for technical reasons it will not be possible to remove the colorings and the industry was concerned they would have to be taken off UK retail shelves.

In further damning comments, industry sources have questioned the FSA Board's decision to go beyond the EFSA recommendations, have suggested the FSA Board has put pressure from NGOs before the science and undermined the UK's "sound science" stance in European negotiating circles.

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<sup>1</sup> Food Standards Agency, April 10 2008, "Board discusses colours advice", <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/apr/coloursadvice>

<sup>2</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission <http://www.codexalimentarius.net/gsaonline/additives/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, April 10 2008, "Europe-wide food colour ban call", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7340426.stm>

<sup>4</sup> FDF press release