



The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Dairy industry tackles food and obesity issues

Federal Assistant Health Minister and Minister responsible for food policy, Dr David Gillespie, today congratulated Australia's dairy industry for the role it is playing in helping to tackle the nation's obesity challenge.

Minister Gillespie was speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Dairy Industry Food and Nutrition Policy Reference Group at Southbank in Melbourne. The reference group was created by the Australian Dairy Industry Council and Dairy Australia and includes representatives of companies including Norco, Jalna, Parmalat and Danone.

Minister Gillespie said it was very positive to see the dairy industry thinking strategically about its place in Australians' diet and nutrition.

"These are vital issues for us because so many of our modern diseases are linked to being overweight or obese," Dr Gillespie said.

Two out of three Australians are now estimated to be either overweight or obese and over one-third of Australian's dietary energy intake comes from energy dense, nutrient poor 'discretionary foods'.

"The Australian Dietary Guidelines set out the types and amounts of foods to eat for good health, a healthy weight and the prevention of diet-related chronic disease.

"However, most Australians are not following the recommendations in the guidelines – not eating enough of the recommended foods, such as dairy foods, and eating too many discretionary foods.

"We believe that the food industry, including dairy, can work with us in government and with consumers to improve the food choices on offer in our supermarkets, our school canteens and our popular fast food outlets."

Minister Gillespie encouraged Australians to increase their intake of recommended foods, such as dairy foods and reduce their intakes of discretionary foods. Food companies can also assist by modifying their products to lower the content of fat, sugar and/or salt, or to produce smaller portions.

"The other thing that manufacturers can do is to simply adopt the Health Star Rating which allows consumers to compare similar products at a glance," he said.

“While only in its relative infancy, around 6,000 products in a typical supermarket of 12,000 packaged food items now display the Health Star Rating. Many of these packaged food products have been reformulated and changes have been made to portion size in order to make them healthier and more nutritious.”

A formal five year review of the Health Star Rating (HSR) system has begun. A Technical Advisory Group has been established to review the calculator which works out the number of stars on food products, and the Department of Health is finalising a formal process for public submissions.

Minister Gillespie encouraged the dairy industry to take part in the review, but noted that the HSR Calculator’s treatment of dairy products had been considered in detail during development.

He also congratulated the dairy industry for taking an active part in the Government’s Healthy Food Partnership.

“A strong commitment from the food industry is vital to ensuring that the Healthy Food Partnership is a success – and success will be measured in better overall health for Australians.

“I do believe that your industry, especially with the advent of this policy reference group, can meet the challenge that overweight and obesity present, and ensure that dairy has an assured place in a healthy diet for Australians of all ages.”

For more information, contact the Minister's Office on (02) 6277 4960