

## IVAA comments on the Draft Report by Adriana Poli Bortone on the Commission's White Paper on nutrition, overweight and obesity related health issues

### 1. The influence of healthy lifestyle on overweight and obesity

The IVAA wants to emphasize that overweight and obesity are not diseases like infectious diseases, which have to be fought against but is rather a deviated way of lifestyle.

This is documented by recent studies in Germany<sup>1</sup>. These studies demonstrate that overweight and obesity is related to the educational level of the citizens and can be more influenced by information and education than by any medical policy.

The concept of the anthroposophic education, practised in the Waldorf-Schools, includes guidance to a healthy lifestyle as one of its major goals. The positive effects of an *anthroposophic lifestyle*, which resulted among other findings in the prevention of allergies, has been demonstrated in two big studies.<sup>2 3</sup> One of those, the PARSIFAL<sup>2</sup> study was partly financed by EU resources. *Anthroposophic lifestyle* includes in addition to the Waldorf pedagogic concept:

- the use of biological and biological-dynamic nutrition, which are free of obesity- and allergy inducing additives,
- Anthroposophic Medicine with its potential to facilitate self-regulation in the patient,
- the school doctor in each Waldorf-School, who is a full member of the educational staff, who follows child development and has therefore an important role in counselling teacher and parents in health education,
- emphasis on moderate consummation of the modern media and on active leisure instead (like learning a musical instrument etc).

The most important factor to reduce overweight and obesity is the support of the ability for self-regulation, which depends on the insight and initiative of each person concerned. Medical interventions are of secondary value in the prevention and therapy of overweight and obesity.

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<sup>1</sup> Brombach C, Wagner U, Eisinger-Watzl M, Heyer A: Die Nationale Verzehrstudie II. Ernährungs-Umschau 2006; 53(1):4-9.

<sup>2</sup> Alm JS, Swartz J, Lilja G, Scheynius A, Pershagen G: Atopy in children of families with an anthroposophic lifestyle. Lancet. 1999 May 1;353(9163):1485-8

<sup>3</sup> Alm JS, Swartz J, Lilja G, Scheynius A, Pershagen G: Atopy in children of families with an anthroposophic lifestyle. Lancet. 1999 May 1;353(9163):1485-8.

IVAA has asked Demeter International<sup>4</sup> to comment on food quality and consumer information as important factors for improving nutrition and health.

## 2. The influence of nutrition and food quality

In the last decades a lot of new research studies were conducted to compare the quality of organic *versus* conventional food.<sup>5</sup> Summarizing the results, it can be stated that organic food is superior in quality and nutrition with regard to the following aspects:

- Higher values of dry matter contents, the content of vitamins and the share of secondary plant fibre,
- organic products contain a far smaller amount of residues of pesticides and nitrates,
- Absence of food additives only a few food additives are allowed,
- organic products have a positive impact on the substance content of the breast milk of nursing mothers.

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of superior food quality for the benefit of the consumers' health, Demeter International encourages the EU (EFSA) to adopt complementary quality tests to gain important additional information about product quality, which cannot be found by chemical analyses.<sup>6</sup>

## 3. Consumer education and strategies for the change of consumers' habits

Consumer surveys indicate that there is a contradiction between consumer knowledge and consumer behaviour.<sup>7</sup> Consumers pretend to buy much more organic food products than they actually do. Consequently, many consumers are aware about the value of healthy food, but do not realize this awareness in their purchase and lifestyle behaviour. If the EU Commission

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<sup>4</sup> Demeter International produces biodynamic food worldwide ([www.demeter.net](http://www.demeter.net))

<sup>5</sup> Schindlegger, G. H., 2004: „Nahrungsmittel aus konventionellem Anbau *versus* biologischen Landbau: Inhaltsstoffe und mögliche Auswirkungen unterschiedlicher Kultivierungs- und Verarbeitungsformen auf die Gesundheit des Menschen, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Gastrointestinaltraktes und des neuroendokrinen Systems.“ Diplomarbeit, Universität Salzburg

<sup>6</sup> Bloksma, J., Northolt, M. und M. Huber, 2004: „Parameters for apple quality and the development of the inner quality concept.“ Louis Bolk Institute, Driebergen, The Netherlands ([www.louisbolk.nl](http://www.louisbolk.nl))

<sup>7</sup> IFOAM-EU GROUP, 2007: Comments on „DG SANCO Future Challenges Paper: 2009-2014“, Brussels, December 2007.

intends to close this gap and to achieve the goal that organic food is bought and consumed more in the future, the most promising action would be to encourage relevant education practice in the early childhood (nursery schools etc.). When children understand that organic food has not only a lot of advantages to improve their own wellbeing and health, but has an important impact on the environment and public welfare, it will be much more likely that they stick to quality food and adapt their purchase and consumption behaviour accordingly.

The IVAA underlines the proven added value, which *anthroposophic lifestyle*, the Waldorf pedagogic concept and the inclusion of biodynamic products into daily nutrition has generated. Anthroposophic Medicine with its focus on facilitating self-regulation and rational active approach to nutrition can help significantly in the prevention and treatment of overweight and obesity.

The IVAA would welcome to participate in research on the field of prevention of overweight and obesity and recommends comparative studies in several EU Member states about different lifestyles or school concepts including school doctor services.

Hollola, Finland, 11 February 2008

On behalf of the Council of the IVAA,



Dr Peter Zimmermann  
President