



Abstract

Introduction of the European Regulatory Framework for New Sweeteners and Sweetness Enhancers and Its Role as a Facilitator or Barrier to Innovation: Results from the SWEET Project [†]

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[†] Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

Abstract: There is a growing consumer interest and public health mandate to reduce sugar intake, and an increased impetus to innovate in the food sector to develop new and more acceptable sweeteners and sweetness enhancers (S&SEs) as low- or non-calorific replacements for sugar. Within the European context, S&SEs are subject to stringent risk assessment and regulatory framework to permit new S&SEs in the European market. There has been a long-standing debate about the role of regulation in facilitating or slowing down innovation processes. The aim of this study is to examine the S&SE regulation and risk governance framework, with a specific focus on the implementation of the precautionary principle to assess its perceived impact on the food industry's ability to innovate. We conducted six semi-structured interviews with food industry applicants for new and novel S&SE approval. The study results indicate that the legislation is achieving its primary aims of harmonising the approval process, ensuring consumer safety, and contributing to the public health policies of the EU. However, there are several barriers to innovation associated with the regulatory framework, including the application of the precautionary principle and the burden-of-proof requirement facing the industry. The barriers are particularly relevant to small and medium organisations who have limited resources to accommodate these uncertainties. An open dialogue between business operatives and risk assessors would be an important step towards raising this awareness and addressing the uncertainties within the process.

Keywords: non-nutritive sweeteners; sugar-reduction; regulation



Citation: Timotijevic, L.; Hodgkins, C.E.; Raats, M.M.; Raben, A.; Halford, J.C.G.; Harold, J. Introduction of the European Regulatory Framework for New Sweeteners and Sweetness Enhancers and Its Role as a Facilitator or Barrier to Innovation: Results from the SWEET Project.

Proceedings **2023**, *91*, 111. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023091111>

Academic Editors: Sladjana Sobajic and Philip Calder

Published: 8 December 2023



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Author Contributions: Conceptualization & funding acquisition: J.H., J.C.G.H. and A.R.; Methodology: L.T., C.E.H. and M.M.R.; Investigation: L.T.; Resources: M.M.R. and C.E.H.; Data curation: L.T.; Supervision: M.M.R. and C.E.H.; Project administration: J.H., J.C.G.H. and M.M.R.; Writing (original draft): L.T.; Writing (review & edit): L.T., C.E.H., M.M.R., A.R., J.C.G.H. and J.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This project has received funding from the European Union's horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 774293.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The University Ethics Committee (UEC) assessed the protocol of the research study and it was deemed that the project did not require a formal UEC review (Reference: 428470-428461-50273850; 24/09/2019).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data will be made available upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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