

Compromise reached on low-calorie pledge

Ian Quinn

The government has reached a compromise with the food industry over its aim to slash the nation's daily calorie intake by five billion, *The Grocer* can reveal.

Retailers and suppliers had cautioned that proposals drawn up after the launch of health secretary Andrew Lansley's obesity strategy would have forced some companies to reformulate or slash portion sizes. But a Department of Health panel has toned down proposals for the Responsibility Deal pledge, enabling the industry to play a fuller part in developing calorie reduction policies without automatically being forced into reformulation.

The latest pledge, seen by *The Grocer* and due to be approved next month, reads: "We will support and enable our customers to eat and drink fewer calories through actions



Lansley's Responsibility Deal aims to reduce the UK's calorie consumption by a whopping five billion a day

such as product/menu reformulation, reviewing portion sizes, education and information, and actions to shift the marketing mix towards lower-calorie options. We will report on our actions on an annual basis."

Behind the scenes, sources said, there had been frantic negotiation to reach the compromise.

"They have diluted it in the hope people will sign up," said a senior retail source involved in the talks. "The proposals that had been drawn up would have made it virtually impossible for some companies to sign up. A company like Mars would not have been able to take part unless it agreed to reformulate

or reduce the size of portions, both of which could have been hugely damaging to the brand."

The revised pledge was welcomed by suppliers.

"There had been a real fear about some of the language. It was seen as anti-growth and we were very dissatisfied until this change of direction," said one source.

Dr Susan Jebb, co-chair of the Responsibility Deal Food network, last month called for "major action by the widest range of partners" to meet the calorie-cutting aim, with plans including "reformulation, portion control and action to shift to lower calorie options".

However, in a letter sent to the industry last week, Dr Jebb said the pledge had been changed to "recognise a wider range of actions". The new package includes everything from recipe changes and portion reduction to funding educational activity.

Retailers will also qualify by running loyalty promotions aimed at healthier eating.

"We are keen to encourage the widest possible engagement on the pledge," Dr Jebb told *The Grocer*. "We have growing business interest and we now want to build momentum."

Suppliers force Argos to pull petfood from site



Suppliers including Nestlé and P&G complained to Argos

Argos has removed more than 50 of the 76 petfood products on its website following complaints from suppliers.

The retailer had sourced the products, many of which were specialist and premium, from a third party without gaining authorisation from the manufacturers.

It confirmed that it had pulled the brands, which

include Mars' Royal Canin and P&G's Iams.

Suppliers said they were unhappy about being on the site and about the quality of information provided about their brands.

Although Nestlé had not removed its Purina brand when *The Grocer* went to press, it said it considered pet stores to be a better place for it.

"We believe these products require a more complex understanding by the owner to select the correct tailored nutrition for their pet," it said.

Argos admitted it was rethinking its petfood offer. "We need to review the product and brand-related information we provide," it said, adding that it remained committed to growing its range.