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Dear Colleague,

Many of you have been waiting for news on the forthcoming regulations for non-lunch food provision and nutrient-based standards in schools. You will be aware that we have been working very closely with the DfES to ensure the new regulations are clear and easy for schools and caterers to implement and yet maintain the best possible approach to improving children's health and nutrition.

This has taken some time to get right and I thank you for your patience. I am sure you will agree that investing the time now to ensure that we can issue clear practical advice and avoid any confusion later is the best approach. We've listened carefully to the very constructive feedback we have received from many of you in response to the first set of regulations and the School Food Trust lunch guide and have used this to advise DfES.

The standards for school food were announced in May 2006 and the School Food Trust produced a guide for caterers, cooks and schools in June 2006. The guide was published ahead of the regulations - which came into force in September 2006 - in order to allow maximum preparation time. There are a small number of differences between the 2006 Regulations and the first School Food Trust guide. Where people have approached us for clarification we have used the Regulations as a basis for our response. We have not however re-issued the guidance, because during this period we have sought to ensure that the 2007 Regulations address the concerns or questions raised in relation to the 2006 standards. These relate mainly to the definition of meat products and frequency with which they may be served; the practical implications of requiring condiments to be served in sachets; and the composition of drinks. The new regulations are designed to ensure that the food-based standards are workable and easy to understand, and we hope that they will be welcomed. The regulations have received Ministerial approval and are now subject to EU and UK Parliament approval. We are anticipating that this will not lead to significant change and are therefore producing our guides in advance of final approval of the Regulations by parliament.

Summary on School Food Regulations and Guides

The Government is introducing new regulations that will update the 2006 regulations for interim food-based standards for school lunches from September 2007, apply to non-lunch provision from September 2007, and introduce the food and nutrient-based standards by 2008 for primary and 2009 for secondary schools.

To help you interpret and implement these regulations, the School Food Trust is producing a series of guides:

- A revised guide on the interim food-based standards for school lunch. This is now available on our website at www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk. Printed copies will be distributed to all schools (to both head teachers and head cooks), to Local Authorities and catering providers by the middle of May. Copies will also be sent to Healthy Schools co-ordinators and others involved in the provision of school food on request.
- A new guide on introducing the Government's food-based standards for all school food other than lunch. This is also available on the School Food Trust website and will be distributed with the revised lunch guide
- A new guide to the food and nutrient-based standards will be made available by the Autumn 2007

What are the changes?

The main changes are related to meat products, drinks and condiments. These are clearly highlighted in the guides. As you will be aware, one of the main issues which required further clarification was the position in relation to the composition of drinks, including the use of additives. Clarifying this has proven to be challenging and time-consuming because the existing legislation is complex and restrictive. The central difficulty has been translating the School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) recommendations to provide drinks that are 'pure' and offer nutritional benefit within the context of existing EU legislation. Under EU law, once plain fruit juice, milk and/or water are combined together, they are classified as non-alcoholic flavoured drinks to which specific additives legislation applies. Member states are bound by these EU directives and cannot further restrict the additives permitted in such drinks. However, The School Food Trust strongly encourages the provision of combination drinks in schools which positively support the nutritional health of children. This key message is reiterated in all our guides. To ensure that these types of drinks are easily accessible, the School Food Trust will be working with drinks manufacturers and others to develop a voluntary code of practice for drinks in schools. In addition, the DfES is discussing the possibility of negotiating changes to

the EU legislative framework on additives with officials from the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

I do hope this letter and guides provide a useful update on what is undoubtedly a complex reform process.

If you have any queries do get in touch with our Information line 0800 089 5001 or by e-mail info@sft.gsi.gov.uk

With best wishes

Judy Hargadon
Chief Executive