

## Plantebranchen: Position on EU School Scheme

**Summary: Fortified plant-based drinks need to be included in the EU milk scheme.**

The Danish Plant-based Business Association (Plantebranchen) welcomes the EU School fruit, vegetable, and milk Scheme as an instrument to support the advancement of healthy and sustainable public food procurement in schools and to let children and adolescents become accustomed to and build acceptance of varied food products that can lay the groundwork for healthy and sustainable diets. In continuation, Plantebranchen welcomes the European Commission's ambition to review the scheme to ensure alignment with the objectives presented in the Farm to Fork Strategy, in Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and in the European Child Guarantee. Fortified plant-based food products meet the quality requirements for relevant nutrients (calcium, protein, etc.) and have their eligibility in the EU School Scheme. In summary, Plantebranchen calls on the European Commission to include plant-based food and drink products in the EU School Scheme.

Representing a substantial part of the Danish plant-based food value chain, Plantebranchen and its member companies and organizations strongly support including fortified plant-based drinks in the EU School Scheme. It is the position of Plantebranchen that, despite its evaluation as an overall effective initiative to promote healthy and sustainable diets, the potential of the EU School Scheme is undermined by the current definition of eligible products which at present does not include fortified plant-based products.

Hence, Plantebranchen welcomes the opportunity to respond to the public consultation on the review of the EU School Scheme and calls on the European Commission and member states to revise the EU School Scheme and to integrate plant-based products as part of eligible products. In particular, Plantebranchen highlights the following priorities to be considered when revising the EU School Scheme:

- 1. Enabling the shift to healthy and sustainable plant-based diets**
- 2. Guaranteeing equal access to nutritious school meals for all children**
- 3. Ensuring a level playing field on the EU agri-food market**

### **(1) Enabling the shift to healthy and sustainable plant-based diets**

With the overall aim of supporting the advancement of healthy and sustainable public food procurement in schools, the EU School Scheme must include fortified plant-based drinks as an alternative to plain milk, which are part of a healthy and sustainable diet.

Widening the scope of eligible products would align the EU School Scheme with the EU health and sustainability objectives as stated in the Farm to Fork Strategy. Of great relevance, the strategy states that: *“Moving to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat and with more fruits and vegetables will reduce not only risks of life-threatening diseases, but also the environmental impact of the food system”* ([source](#)). In this context, it is evident that consensus exists around the fact that the inclusion of fortified plant-based foods and drinks would encourage a shift towards a more plant-based diet that contributes to tackling important and urgent public health and climate change challenges.

Further, the above statement from the Farm to Fork Strategy provides a great argument for a general reallocation of the EU School Scheme funds. In addition to the inclusion of fortified plant-based foods and drinks, Plantebranchen argues that it is necessary to allocate greater funds to fruits and vegetables as these products are integral in enabling a shift to healthy and sustainable plant-based diets. Prioritizing fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods over plain milk in schools is a logical step that adds to the purpose of the EU School Scheme.

## **(2) Guaranteeing equal access to nutritious school meals for all children**

Plantebranchen encourages that we welcome the EU School Scheme as an opportunity for children to discover and be sensitized to new products. This is an important approach to harness the strengths and ensure the long-term value of the EU School Scheme, namely the opportunity to let children effectively discover, become accustomed to, and build acceptance of healthy and sustainable food products that contribute to laying the groundwork for healthy, sustainable diets.

For some, dairy consumption is unsuitable due to lactose intolerance, health conditions or other ethical, environmental, or personal reasons. For this reason, plant-based foods and drinks in school are valuable options for children that for a variety of reasons do not consume animal-based products and hence essential in ensuring equal access to nutritious school meals for all children. In continuation, offering plant-based foods and drinks at school contributes to inclusivity as it fulfills a changing consumer need and accommodates the diverse values, needs and preferences of today's children and adolescents.

Finally, schools are powerful agents of change and in a unique position to drive a shift to sustainable diets. By providing a safe and stimulating environment for children to be exposed to healthy and sustainable food products, schools become instrumental in informing and raising awareness about healthy and sustainable food choices. Acknowledging the important role that schools play and harnessing the potential that they hold is again integral in ensuring that all children - irrespective of socio-economic background and other factors - are treated equally and inspired to adopt favorable consumption habits.

## **(3) Ensuring a level playing field on the EU agri-food market**

Despite a growing demand for plant-based foods, hurdles to market access remain. Plant-based foods have to a certain extent been absent from the EU agricultural promotion policy; a gap that is particularly visible under the EU School Scheme for which only raw fruit, vegetables and milk products are eligible. In line with their ambitions to enable sustainable food systems, Plantebranchen calls on the European Commission to revise the EU School Scheme in order to provide a level playing field for all food system actors.

To ensure fair and open market competition between animal-based and plant-based foods on the EU single market it is central to ensure equal level playing field conditions by including fortified plant-based foods and drinks in the EU School Scheme.

In this context, it is further relevant to highlight the urgent need for EU's organic legislation to facilitate fortification of plant-based drinks. At present, the EU legislation on organic production does not allow fortification of vitamins and minerals in organic plant-based drinks.

Again, in line with the European Green Deal, it is an aim to promote and increase organic and plant-based foods and diets in order to make Europe a more sustainable continent. To achieve this, it is essential to minimize obstacles for consumers to consume sustainably. As a highly relevant example, Lithothamnium calcareum, an alga naturally rich in calcium, should be used in the production of organic plant-based drinks in order to make them a valuable source of calcium and thus a viable alternative to cow's milk. This is an important focus point to ensure that the transition towards organic agriculture does not counteract with the transition towards sustainable plant-based diets.

Plantebranchen strongly encourages that the Litho algae is not to be treated as calcium fortification. We advocate for the use of this algae in organic foods and drinks given our organizations' strong belief that organic plant-based drinks should be able to provide a source of calcium for consumers abstaining from animal-based products for various reasons. In conclusion, allowing fortification with the Litho algae is an important initiative to ensure a level playing field as there - to our knowledge - is currently no other method available with the same beneficial outcome.

**Plantebranchen looks forward to contributing to the review of the EU School Scheme.**

*With more than 70 members spanning the entire food value chain, The Danish Plant-based Business Association represents the voices of the industry's frontrunners aiming to radically change the food system and drive a transition towards a more plant-based diet. Together, we strive for political influence, market development and community building along the food value chain to achieve our common vision of making the world greener through food.*

For more information, please visit [www.plantebranchen.dk](http://www.plantebranchen.dk)