# UK government abandons healthy eating initiative after intense food industry lobbying



The recent decision by the UK government to discard its initiative aimed at promoting healthier eating reflects a significant capitulation to lobbying efforts by major ultra-processed food manufacturers. The original intent of the guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care was to encourage retailers to offer discounts on minimally processed, nutritious foods, thereby making healthier choices more accessible to millions of consumers. However, following persistent pressure from the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), which represents global giants such as Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and Mars, this ambitious policy has been diluted.

In June 2023, the government revised its guidance, which had previously urged supermarkets and other retailers to prioritise promotions on fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The new stance now merely encourages the promotion of “healthier options,” a term that raises valid concerns among health experts. Critics argue that many ultra-processed foods, which are often laden with high fat, sugar, and salt content, still qualify under this revised definition of “healthier.” Thus, the efficacy of this policy in addressing obesity and improving public health is now under scrutiny.

The lobbying campaign led by the FDF, which represents companies with a staggering cumulative turnover exceeding £112 billion, aimed to alter the narrative around food processing. Their correspondence, obtained through a freedom of information request, revealed a concerted effort to remove any mention of minimally processed foods from government guidance. This correspondence highlighted significant dissatisfaction among the FDF’s members regarding the labelling of processed foods, which they argued contradicts scientific evidence.

In early 2023, the FDF confirmed it had succeeded in its request to alter the guidance that was to be issued to retailers, effectively undermining initiatives designed to improve public health. This reversal is viewed by some as an unfortunate victory for manufacturers over public health concerns, as it predominantly aligns with commercial interests rather than those of consumers.

The abandoned initiative comes at a time when UK dietary habits are increasingly concerning. Studies indicate that ultra-processed foods now constitute nearly half of the average British diet, with some demographics, particularly younger and economically disadvantaged individuals, consuming as much as 80%. The implications are dire; ultra-processed foods are associated with numerous health issues, including obesity and related diseases, which are costly to the National Health Service, incurring over £11 billion annually.

The potential health risks associated with high consumption of ultra-processed foods were further underscored by recent research, which indicated a correlation between such diets and increased mortality rates. Alarmingly, it is estimated that these dietary choices contribute to approximately one in seven premature deaths in England, equating to around 17,000 fatalities each year.

In response to this alarming trend, a spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care noted that the modification of the guidance occurred under a previous government. Nonetheless, they reiterated the current administration's commitment to tackling obesity by implementing further measures, such as restricting junk food advertising aimed at children and enhancing local authorities’ authority to manage takeaway establishments near schools. Such efforts are part of a broader strategy to cultivate a healthier population.

While the FDF maintains that its lobbying was aimed at ensuring regulations would not disadvantage food and drink companies, the broader narrative suggests a troubling prioritisation of corporate interests over public health objectives. As the government prepares to implement regulations limiting promotions on high fat, salt, and sugar products later this year, one hopes that future policies might better balance commercial considerations with the overarching need for improved public health.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 - Source [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/ng-interactive/2025/may/17/uk-government-drops-healthy-eating-push-after-lobbying-by-ultra-processed-food-firms)
2. Paragraph 2 - Source [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/ng-interactive/2025/may/17/uk-government-drops-healthy-eating-push-after-lobbying-by-ultra-processed-food-firms)
3. Paragraphs 1, 3 - Source [[3]](https://www.fdf.org.uk/fdf/news-media/press-releases/2022-press-releases/hfss-promotions-restrictions-guidance/)
4. Paragraphs 1, 6 - Source [[4]](https://www.fdf.org.uk/gd-gb/fdf/news-media/news/2024-news/hfss-advertising-ban-statement/)
5. Paragraph 6 - Source [[5]](https://foodmanagement.today/fdf-responds-to-hfss-advertising-ban-delay/)
6. Paragraphs 6, 7 - Source [[6]](https://bakeryinfo.co.uk/legislation/fdf-calls-for-clarity-on-hfss-advertising-as-watchdog-backtracks/699753.article)
7. Paragraph 6 - Source [[7]](https://videoweek.com/2025/01/14/trade-groups-bristle-as-asa-warns-brand-campaigns-may-be-hit-by-uk-hfss-ad-ban/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/ng-interactive/2025/may/17/uk-government-drops-healthy-eating-push-after-lobbying-by-ultra-processed-food-firms> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/ng-interactive/2025/may/17/uk-government-drops-healthy-eating-push-after-lobbying-by-ultra-processed-food-firms> - An investigation by The Guardian reveals that the UK government's initiative to encourage retailers to promote healthier, minimally processed foods was abandoned following lobbying by major ultra-processed food companies. The Department of Health and Social Care had initially advised retailers to offer deals on nutritious items like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. However, after pressure from the Food and Drink Federation, representing corporations such as Nestlé, Coca-Cola, and Mars, the guidance was revised to focus on promoting 'healthier options' without specifying minimally processed foods. This shift has raised concerns among health experts about the effectiveness of the policy in combating obesity and improving public health.
3. <https://www.fdf.org.uk/fdf/news-media/press-releases/2022-press-releases/hfss-promotions-restrictions-guidance/> - In April 2022, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) expressed disappointment over the UK government's implementation of restrictions on promotions of High in Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS) foods. The FDF argued that these measures would negatively impact the food and drink industry, estimating costs exceeding £1 billion annually, and questioned their effectiveness in reducing obesity rates. The FDF also raised concerns that the restrictions could contribute to food price inflation, affecting both businesses and consumers.
4. <https://www.fdf.org.uk/gd-gb/fdf/news-media/news/2024-news/hfss-advertising-ban-statement/> - In January 2025, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) criticized further delays in the publication of guidance for the HFSS advertising ban, originally announced in 2022. The FDF emphasized the need for clarity, stating that the lack of detailed information was causing uncertainty and potential costly changes for businesses. The FDF urged the government and regulators to provide clear guidance promptly to allow the industry to prepare effectively for the upcoming restrictions.
5. <https://foodmanagement.today/fdf-responds-to-hfss-advertising-ban-delay/> - The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) responded to further delays and lack of clarity regarding the HFSS advertising ban, scheduled to take effect in October 2025. The FDF expressed disappointment over the unclear and confusing information shared by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which had previously consulted on the ban. The FDF called for prompt and clear guidance to enable businesses to plan and implement the necessary changes effectively.
6. <https://bakeryinfo.co.uk/legislation/fdf-calls-for-clarity-on-hfss-advertising-as-watchdog-backtracks/699753.article> - The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) called for clarity on the forthcoming HFSS regulations after the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) indicated that certain aspects of the proposed guidance would require revision. The FDF expressed concern over the lack of clarity and potential changes to the scope of the restrictions, urging the government and regulators to provide clear and timely guidance to allow businesses to prepare effectively for the implementation of the ban.
7. <https://videoweek.com/2025/01/14/trade-groups-bristle-as-asa-warns-brand-campaigns-may-be-hit-by-uk-hfss-ad-ban/> - Trade groups, including the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), expressed concern over the Advertising Standards Authority's (ASA) warning that brand advertising campaigns may be affected by the upcoming HFSS advertising ban. The ASA noted that the law's wording does not explicitly reference brand advertising, leading to potential restrictions on brand campaigns associated with HFSS products. Industry representatives called for urgent clarity to ensure businesses can navigate the new regulations effectively.