

Malay Mail : 'Call for less sugar in food and drinks timely'

Written by Administrator

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CONSUMER groups have applauded the Health Ministry's call for food and beverage manufacturers to reduce the sugar content in their products, especially carbonated drinks.

The current 15gm sugar content in carbonated drinks is to be reduced to 5gm to encourage better health among Malaysians.

Yesterday, National Consumers Complaints Centre director Darshan Singh welcomed the call by the ministry.

He said the high content of sugar has been scientifically linked to many ailments and the government's call to set guidelines for sugar-laden items is timely.

The order for reduction of sugar in food and carbonated drinks alone is not enough to make sure manufacturers will abide by the regulation. Regular monitoring of guidelines should be carried out to ensure compliance, he said, adding that it is high time the ministry looks deeply into the health needs of Malaysians.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations president Datuk Marimuthu Nadason, who also welcomed the move, said that it has been a much awaited response from the ministry.

We have been fighting against the high level of sugar in food and beverages for many years, and now we are overwhelmed that the government is giving serious consideration to it.

Sugar is the main cause of diabetes and undeniably, it is the cause of many other disease, so the move is most welcome, he said.

He also suggested that the government work together with NGOs to create more awareness.

We are not only talking about the sugar content reduction issue but also other battles the government has been fighting for the consumers' benefit, he added.

Consumers Association of Subang and Shah Alam president Jacob George also shared Fomca and NCCC's sentiments.

Cassa, he said, can now heave a sigh of relief following the government's call on the issue.

For 15 years, we have called for stricter regulations on fast-food ingredients, sugar content in products and other grassroot problems involving consumers. Finally, the time has come for us to thank the ministry for responding, he said.

The three groups were responding to an article in an English daily yesterday quoting Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek.

It was reported that Dr Chua had been discussing the reduction of sugar in food and beverages with multinational and local manufacturing companies, and an initial agreement has been reached by all parties.

However, he said that the beverage manufacturers are not reducing the sugar content in carbonated drinks to 5gm but instead, only agreed to reduce it to 9.5gm.

He also added that the ministry has set up a technical committee to go through the content of food and beverages in Malaysia with the aim of reducing sugar, salt and fat content.

Dr Chua proposed a label called Healthier Choice Food and Drinks for products which comply with the 5gm sugar content call.

Dr Chua had also said that, beverage manufacturers were reluctant to reduce sugar content because Malaysians have a sweet tooth.