



European Community of Consumer Co-operatives

**European Consumer Day
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“Sustainable Consumption”**

Panel I: Sustainable Products & Services

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Outline

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1. Introduction to EURO COOP

- EURO COOP was founded in Brussels in 1957 with the main objectives of representing at EU-level the interests of consumer co-operatives and their consumer-members
- EURO COOP today includes 17 national federations of consumer co-operatives with over 22m consumer-members across the EU and candidate Member States
- Consumer co-operatives have a long tradition at national and EU-levels of actively defending consumer interests
- Consumer Co-operatives were founded by consumers for consumers to respond to their needs in terms of sustainable goods and services
- Consumer Co-operatives respond to their consumer-members' needs in ways that take account of their local environments, their consumers' health and well-being, while also respecting their own social responsibility as undertakings
- Sustainable Consumption has therefore always been a core value.

2. EU Sustainable Consumption & Sustainable Development initiatives

- 2001 EU Sustainable Development Strategy:
 - “...decoupling environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development requires a major reorientation of public and private investment towards new, environmentally-friendly technologies. The Strategy should be a catalyst for policy-makers and public opinion...and become a driving force for **changes in corporate and consumer behaviour.**”
- 2005 Review of the SDS:
 - “...not enough progress has been made, unsustainable trends have yet to start to reverse, and the stakes remain high”
 - “Future prosperity and quality of life depend on capacity and commitment to **change production and consumption patterns**”

3. Sustainable Consumption: Compatible with Lisbon Objectives?

- 2010 Lisbon Objectives include creating more jobs by higher economic growth
- However, economic growth also implies growth in consumption
- Worryingly, consumption is now a pastime, an end in itself (e.g., “Retail Therapy”)
- How can this consumption growth be made “sustainable”?
 - Improved policy coherence (e.g., greener public procurement – public procurement accounts for *circa* 19% of GDP)
 - Getting prices right so they reflect the total cost
 - Using incentives (e.g., taxes on unsustainable consumption patterns)
 - Investing in R&D to stimulate development of more sustainable products & services (e.g., sustainable development funds)
 - Communicating and mobilising suppliers of goods & services and consumers via education, information (e.g., labels), etc...

4. Consumers as Drivers of Sustainable Consumption

- Final EU consumption amounts to over half of EU GDP
- In turn, the EU is the world's largest trader of goods (19%) and commercial services (24%)
- European consumers therefore have a great potential to be drivers of sustainable consumption, not only within Europe, but more importantly at global-level
- In order to achieve this potential, consumers must:
 - be positively empowered by the availability and affordability of sustainable goods and services
 - understand the consequences of their consumption patterns via education (schools...) and Information (Fair Trade labels...)

5. Supplier Responsibility

- As consumers, we are often “locked-into” unsustainable behaviour – willing to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns, but unable to do so due to lack of availability and affordability of sustainable products & services
- Suppliers therefore have a responsibility to offer more sustainable products and services to consumers
- As the positive experiences of consumer co-operatives can attest in the following slides, sustainable products and services lead to “Win-Win” situations with:
 - Reductions in environmental impacts on both the production & consumption sides, while
 - Offering opportunities for innovative offerings that both increase consumer value and offer companies competitive advantage in ever-increasingly sophisticated, competitive markets.

6. Consumer Co-operative Sustainable Consumption Best Practices (1)

- **Ethical and Fair Trade**

- **SOK**, the Finnish consumer co-operative, is the largest seller of Fair Trade products in Finland, including coffee, tea, cocoa, honey, chocolate, sugar, etc., with up to 50% of all bananas sold in Finnish consumer co-operatives being Fair Trade
- Finnish consumer co-operatives' support for Fair Trade has led Finland to have the third-highest *per capita* consumption of Fair Trade products in the world.



6. Consumer Co-operative Sustainable Consumption Best Practices (2)



- **Sustainable Packaging**
 - The **UK Co-op Group**, one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives, introduced in 2002 the first ever fully biodegradable carrier bag in order to reduce landfill waste...

6. Consumer Co-operative Sustainable Consumption Best Practices (3)



- **Education**

- **ANCC-COOP**, the Italian consumer co-operatives, have since 1980 conducted a nationwide schools programme to educate school children about the consequences of their purchase behaviour...

7. Challenges for the future...

- Sustainable products & services must be “mainstreamed”:
 - Make sustainable products and services available and affordable for all consumers
- Ultimately, we must all reflect about the effect on society of the choices we make as consumers:
 - Are we merely “consumers”, or are we “consumer-citizens”...

Thank you.

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