

RESPONSIBLE MARGARINE AND SPREAD INDUSTRY: DELIVERING POSITIVE IMPACT FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE AND HEALTHY WORLD

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The EU Farm to Fork Strategy sets the path towards developing more sustainable and healthy food systems good for the people and the planet. The food industry plays a large role in enabling this transition: On the one hand, food production has great impact on the overall global environmental footprint; on the other hand, food availability and affordability substantially influence consumer choice and behaviours.

The margarine and spread industry acknowledges such responsibility and has already taken decisive steps towards providing healthier and more environmentally-friendly products to consumers. This includes implementing responsible business and marketing practices across the supply chain, namely:

- **Product reformulation** to improve the nutritional value of margarine and spreads. The sector has been working on improving its recipes for over thirty years. This led to:
 - **Substantial decrease in trans fat content.** The level of trans fats in margarine has been below 2% for over twenty years, and that of liquid margarine below 1%¹. Moreover, dietary surveys in Europe (between 1999 and 2012) indicate that trans fatty acids (TFA) intake has been below 1% in Western Europe for over 13 years^{2,3,4}. This is also the result of the sector's reformulation efforts, based on the WHO recommendations for cardiovascular health, which suggest switching from animal to plant-based fat sources while keeping the level of trans fats equal to or below 1% of the daily energy intake⁵. IMACE's members invested in reformulation for both B2B and B2C products: Between 2004 and 2014, our members have reduced the average TFA level of their B2B margarine by more than five times⁶. Nowadays, B2B margarines only contain 1.3% TFA

¹ [Scientific Opinion on the presence of trans fatty acids in foods and the effects on human health of the consumption of trans fatty acids](#), EFSA Panel on Dietetic products, Nutrition and Energy (NDA), *EFSA Journal* (2004) 81, 1-49, August 2004

² Hulshof KF, van Erp-Baart MA, Anttolainen M, Becker W, Church SM, et al. (1999) Intake of Fatty Acids in Western Europe with Emphasis on Trans Fatty Acids: [The TRANSFAIR Study](#). *Eur J clin Nutr* 53: 143–157

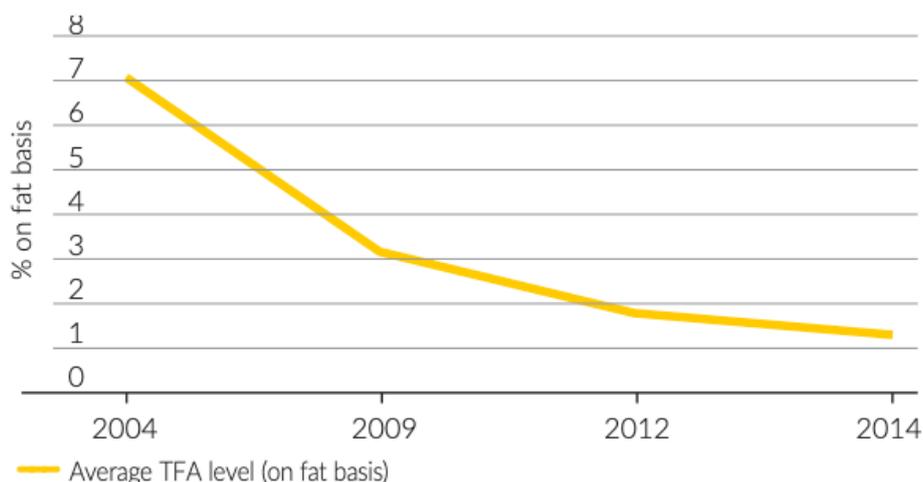
³ AFSSA (2009) [Avis de l'Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments sur l'estimation des apports en acides gras trans de la population française](#).

⁴ Capita R, Alonso-Calleja C (2003) [Intake of Nutrients Associated with an Increased Risk of Cardiovascular Disease in a Spanish Population](#). *Int J Food Sci Nutr* 54: 57–75. doi:10.1080/096374803/000062001

⁵ [Diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic disease](#), Report of a joint WHO/FAO expert consultation, *WHO Technical Report Series, No. 916 (TRS 916)*

⁶ From 7.1% to 1.3% (on fat basis) from 2004 to 2014. Based on an internal IMACE survey covering 75% of the B2B market for margarines in Europe.

on average (Graph 1). TFAs in margarine products therefore ceased to be a public health concern in Europe long before the adoption of the current EU legislation establishing maximum levels of TFAs⁷.

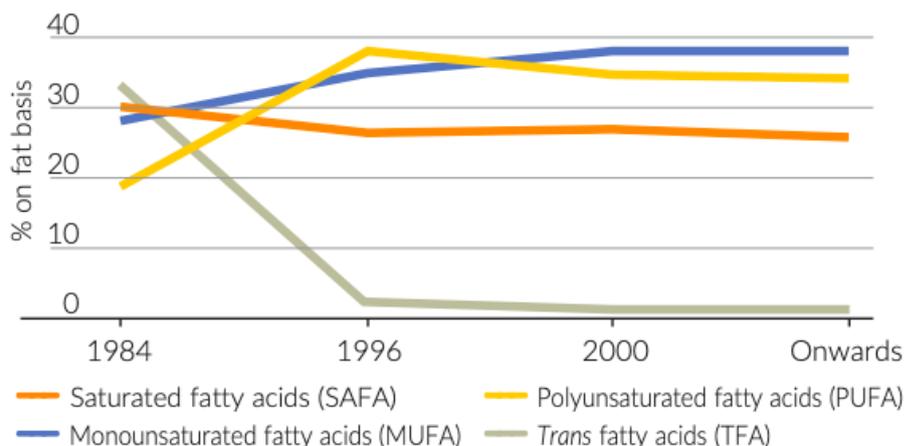


Graph 1 Reduction of trans fatty acids in B2B margarine

- **Decrease in saturated fat content.** In addition to removing TFA from retail margarine and spreads, our sector has undertaken other beneficial changes by replacing saturated fats (SFA) with mono or poly-unsaturated fatty acids (MUFA, PUFA). Margarine is naturally richer in MUFA and PUFA, which favours cardiovascular health⁸. Research and innovation further contributed to decreasing the level of SFA (Graph 2) in modern margarine, accompanied by an increase in unsaturated fatty acids such as Omega 3, providing products with an optimal fat profile. Margarine manufacturers have thus taken part in various national initiatives on that mission.

⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/649](#) amending Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards trans fat, other than trans fat naturally occurring in fat of animal origin

⁸ [Scientific Opinion](#) on the substantiation of health claims related to the replacement of mixtures of saturated fatty acids (SFAs) as present in foods or diets with mixtures of monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) and/or mixtures of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), and maintenance of normal blood LDL-cholesterol, *EFSA Panel on Dietetic products, Nutrition and Energy (NDA), EFSA Journal 2011; 9(4):2069, January 2011*



Graph 2- Reduction of trans fatty acids in retail margarine

- **The addition of vitamins via food fortification.** Margarine and spreads are suitable food products through which to integrate important vitamins. The majority of margarine today is fortified with vitamin D, alongside other vitamins, such as vitamin A and E naturally present in the product.

Thanks to the progress in product reformulation, today's margarine is a healthy plant-based source of essential fatty acids and vitamins, included in many national nutritional guidelines, such as the Dutch 'Wheel of Five'⁹, the Danish 'Officielle Kostråd'¹⁰ and the Flemish 'Nutrition Triangle'¹¹.

- **Transparent and clear communication to consumers.** The margarine and spreads industry is committed to providing consumers with the right nutritional information on products via proper food labelling. Consistency in EU legislation is key to achieve this goal. IMACE has been calling on the EU to align the Food Information to Consumer (FIC) Regulation with Regulation (EU) 2019/649 on maximum levels of trans-fatty acids by removing the mandatory labelling for 'partially and fully hydrogenated fats', which conveys redundant and potentially confusing information to consumers.
- **Preserving biodiversity and halting deforestation.** The margarine and spreads industry acts against deforestation as a core part of its corporate social responsibility activities. IMACE is also actively engaged on the topic by:
 - Joining forces with other organisations addressing the environmental and social aspects of the palm oil supply chain, such as the Roundtable on

⁹ The Dutch Wheel of Five recommends a daily intake of 40gr of spreadable and cooking fats such as oils and low-fat margarine. [Eat Well with the Wheel of Five](#), January 2018

¹⁰ The Danish Officielle Kostråd recommends decreasing saturated fats intake by switching from animal-based fats (e.g. butter) to plant-based fats such as oil or soft margarine.

¹¹ The Flemish Nutrition Triangle indicates margarine as a healthy source of unsaturated fats. <https://www.gezondleven.be/themas/voeding/voedingsdriehoek/oli%C3%ABn-en-vetten>

Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and the European Sustainable Palm Oil Advocacy Group (ESPOAG).

- Taking part in industry joint actions such as the Amsterdam Declaration, where the sector committed to sourcing 100% sustainable palm oil.
- Improving production processes that **minimise GHG emissions** and make **wise use of resources**, such as energy and water consumption. The industry has invested in cutting-edge technologies able to reduce the environmental footprint of its production plants, making use of more sustainable sources of energy (e.g. photovoltaic panels, thermal energy).

The actions taken by the sector along the years contributed to making modern margarine a healthy and sustainable plant-based fat source, both in terms of nutritional profile and overall environmental footprint^{12,13}. Representing the plant-based spreadable fat industry, the margarine sector fully embraces the EU Farm to Fork's ambition to move towards more plant-based diets, and is eager to further contribute to making such transition a reality. Concrete actions will include:

- **Reducing food waste** by implementing sustainable waste management practices, supporting local recycling initiatives, retaining the value of by-products of margarine production towards reuse or recovery.
- **Reducing packaging waste** by choosing more sustainable and safe packaging made of recyclable materials.
- **Investing in projects for sustainable and healthy eating** to support the transition beyond the margarine's supply chain.

Fulfilling such commitments is a priority for the margarine and spread industry towards building a more sustainable and healthy future.

¹² Liao, X., Gerichhausen, M. J., Bengoa, X., Rigarlford, G., Beverloo, R. H., Bruggeman, Y., & Rossi, V. (2020). [Large-scale regionalised LCA shows that plant-based fat spreads have a lower climate, land occupation and water scarcity impact than dairy butter](#). *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 1-16.

¹³ Nilsson, K., Flysjö, A., Davis, J., Sim, S., Unger, N., & Bell, S. (2010). [Comparative life cycle assessment of margarine and butter consumed in the UK, Germany and France](#). *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 15(9), 916-926.