

# CEEREAL SUGAR STATEMENT

June 2026

CEEREAL members are committed to providing people in Europe with a broad range of breakfast cereal options that are safe, nutritious, sustainable, accessible, convenient, and enjoyable. As the European association representing the breakfast cereal and oat milling industry, CEEREAL brings together companies of all sizes to promote the role of breakfast cereals as part of a healthy and balanced diet. Breakfast cereals are an integral part of many people's daily diets, and their consumption is associated with higher intakes of vitamins, minerals, fibre and whole grain, supporting overall dietary balance<sup>1</sup>.

## THE BREAKFAST CHOICE

Breakfast traditions across Europe vary greatly. Some countries prefer a savoury breakfast while others would opt for a sweet breakfast, and portion sizes also differ. The nutritional quality of a breakfast cannot be reduced solely to the sugar content of its components, especially if this is not considered in relation to the portion consumed. The presence of other key nutrients - vitamins and minerals, fibre and whole grains, protein, etc. - as well as overall nutritional balance throughout the day are essential parameters to consider.

## SUGARS IN BREAKFAST CEREALS

Sugars are a type of carbohydrate, alongside starches and fibres, and contribute to the body's energy intake. In breakfast cereals, sugars can be present naturally, for example, from grains or fruit, and may also be used as ingredients to deliver specific functions, such as taste, texture and colour.

Public health recommendations highlight the importance of moderating the intake of added or free sugars<sup>2</sup>. When considering the contribution of breakfast cereals to sugar intake, this should happen in the context of overall diet, portion size and frequency of consumption.

## THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE OF SUGARS IN BREAKFAST CEREALS

Breakfast cereal manufacturers continue reformulating and reducing sugars in their products while ensuring that people choosing breakfast cereals in the morning can enjoy them without compromising on taste. Sugars fulfil various functions in food, in addition to providing sweetness:

- Ensuring food safety, by reducing the water available for micro-organism proliferation
- Enhancing product preservation over time, by protecting the cereals from moisture and rancidity, as well as micronutrients from oxidation,
- Giving taste and aroma to foods,
- Adding structure and texture,
- Giving colour, e.g., through caramelisation.

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<sup>1</sup> See also <https://www.ceereal.eu/breakfast-cereals/>

<sup>2</sup> For example: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/added-and-free-sugars-should-be-low-possible>

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF BREAKFAST CEREALS TO DAILY SUGAR INTAKES

Breakfast cereals come in great variety giving people a wide range of options and different levels of sugars or no sugars. Breakfast cereals contribute between 2-11% of daily total and free sugar intakes in high consuming countries like Ireland, UK, France, the US and Canada<sup>3</sup>.

The reference intake for total sugars for adults is 90g per day under EU Regulation 1169/2011. Public health authorities recommend moderating the intake of added or free sugars, as excessive consumption is associated with increased risks of obesity, type 2 diabetes and metabolic disease<sup>4</sup>.

## REFORMULATION – COMMITMENTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Between 2015 and 2025, the sales-weighted average sugar content of products sold by CEEREAL members in the EU and UK decreased by 18.2%, while the wholegrain content increased by almost 23% and the fibre content grew by 21.2%<sup>5</sup>.

CEEREAL members are committed to further improving the nutritional value of breakfast cereals, including by working on reformulation and innovation to offer healthier and tasty options for people. This includes making it easier for people to identify these products and understand their benefits.

Under the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices<sup>6</sup>, companies, including various CEEREAL members, have committed on an individual level<sup>7</sup> to further work on reformulation.

In addition, as part of the wide range of breakfast cereals on offer, manufacturers continue developing products that are either low in sugars or have no added sugars.

## CHILDREN & BREAKFAST CEREALS

Significant reformulation efforts have been undertaken by breakfast cereal manufacturers to improve the nutritional profile of children's products, including reducing added sugars and increasing the content of whole grains and dietary fibre. Several manufacturers have also introduced new cereals with higher fibre content and lower sugar levels.

Between 2015 and 2025, CEEREAL members decreased the sales-weighted average sugar content in children's products sold in the EU and UK by almost 30%<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See table 3 in systematic review: <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/17/10/1680>

<sup>4</sup> For example: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/added-and-free-sugars-should-be-low-possible>

<sup>5</sup> Overall results are based on sales-weighted averages for recipes representing 85% of volume sales among products sold by CEEREAL members in the EU and the UK in 2015 and 2025. In 2026, the underlying dataset was further expanded across all reporting years, providing an even more accurate representation of how product composition has evolved over time.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2021). *EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices*. [https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2021-06/f2f\\_sfpd\\_coc\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2021-06/f2f_sfpd_coc_final_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2021). *Pledges to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices*. Food Safety. [https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct/individual-pledges\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct/individual-pledges_en)

<sup>8</sup> For children's products, results are based on the sales-weighted average of products sold in the EU and the UK during the same years.

In the UK, breakfast cereals contribute 7% to daily intakes of free sugars by children aged 4 to 18. In Ireland, they contribute between 6 and 7% of daily total sugar intakes for children aged 5 to 18. In France, it is between 2 and 4% for children up to 17 years for total daily sugar<sup>9</sup>.

CEEREAL members do not engage in marketing communications to children in primary schools, early childhood education centres or children's care service centres across the EU27, except where specifically requested by, or agreed with, the school administration for educational purposes.

Some CEEREAL members submitted commitments under voluntary international initiatives, such as the EU Pledge, the International Food & Beverage alliance (IFBA) or the EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Business and Marketing Behaviour, which aim to change the way of advertising to children.

## LIMITATIONS TO REFORMULATION

Reformulation requires significant time, effort and investment. Removing or replacing sugars can have consequences for:

- Taste and flavour where rapid changes risk losing consumers on the journey of reformulation,
- Colour, appearance, texture, mouthfeel and crunchiness impacting consumer perception and acceptance,
- Stability, shelf-life and food safety, where replacing or removing certain ingredients can have an impact on shelf life and safety of products,
- Costs, meaning that trying to reduce, remove or replace certain ingredients is time-consuming and costly for food businesses, which – due to higher prices – may affect product accessibility.

The calorie content of breakfast cereals remains relatively consistent when sugars are reduced, as replacement ingredients also provide calories.

## SWEETENERS

The permitted use of sweeteners in breakfast cereals is currently substantially restricted under Regulation (EC) 1333/2008<sup>10</sup>. Specifically, non-nutritive sweeteners are only allowed in cereals that contain more than 15% fibre and at least 20% bran, and achieving a minimum of 30% energy reduction or no added sugar.

Meeting these three conditions simultaneously – including due to the need to replace sugars with other bulk ingredients - is technically challenging and might not meet consumer acceptance.

## AN ENABLING REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR BREAKFAST CEREALS

An enabling regulatory framework is essential to support and incentivise reformulation efforts and ensure that consumers can make informed choices.

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<sup>9</sup> Derbyshire, E. J., & Ruxton, C. H. S. (2025). A Systematic Review of Evidence on the Role of Ready-to-Eat Cereals in Diet and Non-Communicable Disease Prevention. *Nutrients*, 17(10), 1680. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17101680>.

<sup>10</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on food additives, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2008/1333/oj/eng>.

A review of the sugar reduction claims framework would allow companies to communicate smaller but nonetheless meaningful improvements. Currently, claims are only permitted when a reduction of at least 30% versus the market average is achieved.

In Switzerland, the government allows sugar reduction claims even if the threshold of 30% is not reached provided that the reduction is not compensated by ingredients that add a sweet taste, the reduction of added sugar is at least 5%, and overall sugar is reduced. A claim to highlight the change in sensory characteristics can be used for one year<sup>11</sup>.

## INSIGHTS INTO CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Consumer acceptance, particularly in terms of texture and taste, is key to successful reformulation. Abrupt and drastic changes in sugar content can affect taste preferences with notable drops in acceptance observed below certain sweetness levels.

Consumers who prefer a sweeter taste may shift to alternative, less nutritious products if expectations are not met. Effective communication and education on the benefits of reduced sugar consumption are therefore important to support consumer acceptance of reformulated products.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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<sup>11</sup> Confédération suisse (2016). *Ordonnance du DFI concernant l'information sur les denrées alimentaires* (OIDAI), Article 42a, du 16 décembre 2016 (Etat le 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 2020). <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2017/158/fr>.