



Norbert Lins
Parlement européen
Bât. Altiero Spinelli
03F152
60, rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60
B-1047 Bruxelles/Brussel

18th July 2019

Dear Mr Lins,

I am writing to you about the European School Milk Scheme, which we believe unfairly excludes vegans, resulting in indirect discrimination.

The Vegan Society is an international charity based in the UK and our work includes promoting good health, the environment and protecting the rights of vegans.

As you may be aware, vegans hold sincere ethical convictions, and seek to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose. Vegans do not, therefore, drink the milk of any animal. Instead, vegans around the world enjoy fortified plant milks.

Vegans in Europe are protected under the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which strengthens the principle of non-discrimination. The public sector (including schools) is, therefore, obliged to take all necessary steps to accommodate the needs of vegans to prevent direct or indirect discrimination.

The sincere convictions of vegans come within the protection of the law, and on the face of it, it appears that the European School Milk Scheme could inadvertently be discriminatory. Vegans in the UK are protected under human rights and equality law. As such, the public sector (including schools) is obliged to take all necessary steps to accommodate the needs of vegans to prevent direct or indirect discrimination.

Vegan pupils do not drink the milk of any animal and consume, instead, plant milks. The Regulation underpinning the Scheme provides that schools and other educational institutions will provide animal milk to pupils for a cheaper price, increasing access and availability of animal milk but does not include an option to provide non-dairy milks as an alternative within the Scheme.

Therefore, since the European School Milk Scheme was first established in 1977 it has excluded vegan pupils, resulting in indirect discrimination.

The number of vegans in the UK has quadrupled over the 4 years prior to 2018, with the number estimated to be around 600,000 and rising. In the UK, 17% of consumers report dairy avoidance in their household. This means that there are many children who are excluded from the European School Milk Scheme.

You will no doubt be aware of the importance of the European Union wide principle of non-discrimination and related initiatives implemented throughout the EU to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. In the context of this high value placed on plurality it is vital to ensure that all children feel accepted in their school environment. Differences should be celebrated

rather than penalised. Promoting equality in school fosters good relationships in communities, teaches valuable skills with regards to acceptance of diversity, and reduces the chance of bullying. Furthermore, treating young people equally aids individual well-being and prevents those with different characteristics from feeling isolated and excluded.

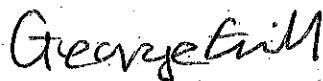
Fortified plant milks are a sustainable choice, requiring far less land and water than dairy milk, whilst also generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Oat milk for example requires less than 10 times the amount of land, 9 times the amount of water and produces on average 3 times less greenhouse gas emissions than cow's milk (*Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers* - Poore & Nemecek - 2018 - University of Oxford). If we are going to meaningfully tackle the climate emergency, we cannot afford to ignore the environmental benefits that fortified plant milks offer, whilst not compromising on our nutrition.

It is important for everyone to eat calcium rich foods daily and fortified plant-based milk plays an important role in vegan nutrition. In fact, the UK's Eatwell Guide recognises that fortified plant-based milk represents a valuable alternative to cow's milk. Calcium content is comparable, and the soya variety is similar to cow's milk in terms of protein content and quality. In addition, the British Dietetic Association and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics acknowledge that well-planned vegan diets can support healthy living during all stages of life.

The scheme could easily be made far more inclusive and avoid discrimination by including fortified plant milks. This would allow vegan children, as well as those who don't drink milk for other reasons, to enjoy the benefits of accessing affordable, nutritious drinks within school.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the issues outlined above and the importance of incorporating fortified plant milks into the EU School Milk Scheme.

Yours sincerely,



George Gill
Chief Executive Officer
The Vegan Society