

ENSA's statement on the ANSES report on the dietary exposure of children under three years of age to chemical substances

Brussels, 11 October - A recent report¹ published by French agency ANSES presents the results of the agency's study on the dietary exposure of children under three years of age to chemical substances. One of the outcomes of the report is that the risk of consumption of isoflavone genistein, which occurs in soy-based products, cannot be ruled out. The report recommends that the consumption of soy-based products by children under three years of age be limited.

The European Natural Soy and Plant-based Food Manufacturers Association (ENSA) strongly disagrees with this opinion as it is not supported by the most recent scientific evidence:



- ENSA does agree with ANSES that children up to 1 year old should not consume soy or other plant-based drinks as they will not meet their nutritional needs. Children up to 1 year need either breast milk or a specifically adapted infant formula, be it cow's milk based or soy based. This also applies for cow's milk which is not suitable for children below 1 year old, which is mentioned in the report.
- The scientific literature confirms that there is **no difference in the development of infants fed with soy-based formula and infants fed with cow's milk-based formula or breast milk on all studied parameters** (growth, bone health and metabolic, reproductive, endocrine, immune and neurological functions). This is confirmed by a recently published meta-analysis (Vandenplas, 2014). The Beginnings study (Andres, 2015) has also not detected any negative effect.
- As of 1 year of age, children's diet starts to vary and they gradually begin to consume different kinds of foods as part of a family meal. From this age onwards soy and plant-based drinks can be integrated as part of a balanced and varied diet. Soy foods produced from soy beans provide high quality proteins, unsaturated fatty acids, fibres, vitamins and minerals, which makes them a nutrient-rich alternative to dairy for children after the age of 1. **There are no human studies that link the consumption of soy and plant-based foods to any negative health effects in young children (from 1 to 3 years old).** A full review of the available scientific literature on soy consumption in France, its nutritional qualities and health effects has recently been published in OCL - Oilseeds and fats, Crops and Lipids journal².
- **In Asia infants start eating traditional tofu-type soy foods from an early age** and have done so for thousands of years without any negative effect on their health.

¹ Étude de l'alimentation totale infantile - ANSES, September 2016 - <https://www.anses.fr/en/content/anses-scrutinises-diet-children-under-three-years-age>

² Les aliments au soja : consommation en France, qualités nutritionnelles et données scientifiques récentes sur la santé - OCL 2016, 23 (4) - <http://www.ocljournal.org/articles/ocl/pdf/2016/04/ocl160025-s.pdf>

- Isoflavones are natural compounds present in soy and in other legumes such as chickpeas and lentils. They are not chemicals and genistein is not added to soy foods. Isoflavones have been extensively studied by the European Food Safety Authority, which has not found any adverse health effect from consuming isoflavones in food supplements³.
- ANSES refers to the level of 35 mg of isoflavone genistein per kilogram of body weight per day as a cut-off dose after which consumption may have some negative effects on health. **This figure is based on studies in rodents but findings of animal studies cannot be extrapolated to humans since their metabolism is quite different.** We therefore believe that it is misleading to apply this reference to nutritional advice on soy food consumption by humans.
- We therefore urge ANSES to amend their recommendations on the consumption of soy-based products by young children in light of the aforementioned scientific evidence.

ENDS

About ENSA

Established in January 2003, ENSA represents the interests of natural soy and plant-based food manufacturers in Europe. The term “natural” refers to the production process used by ENSA members to produce food using whole soybeans. Soy food products from ENSA members are produced without any use of GM (genetically modified) material or GM beans.

ENSA is an association of internationally operating companies, ranging from large corporations to small, family-owned businesses with an annual turnover of €0.8 billion. Since its establishment in 2003, ENSA has been raising awareness about the role of soy and a plant-based diet in moving towards more sustainable food production and consumption patterns.

For more information about ENSA, please visit www.ensa-eu.org or contact the Secretariat.

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³ Risk assessment for peri- and post-menopausal women taking food supplements containing isolated isoflavones - European Food Safety Authority, September 2015 - <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4246>