

## **Government actions to reduce coronary heart diseases in Finland**

**Auli Suojanen, National Food Agency, Finland**

([auli.suojanen@nfa.fi](mailto:auli.suojanen@nfa.fi))

### **ABSTRACT**

In the beginning of 70's the coronary heart mortality in Finland was one of the highest in the world. It was already then widely agreed that food habits influence serum cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and also the incidence of coronary heart disease. Finnish National Nutrition Council and other expert committees gave recommendations to reduce the consumption of fat and saturated fats in particular. In addition, it was recommended that the intake of salt (sodium) should be reduced, and the consumption of fruits and vegetables as well as fibre rich cereals should be increased. Different measures to support the changes in dietary habits were proposed.

For example, following measures were taken:

- North Karelia Project, a project to prevent cardiovascular disease among residents of Eastern Finland with the co-operation of different parties.
- Improving the nutritional quality of community subsidised lunches (schools etc.).
- Legislative actions like more liberal margarine act and increasing labelling information on salt and fat content of foods.
- Adding selenium to fertilisers for improving the selenium intake of Finnish population.

Some proposed actions of nutrition experts did not realise. The recommended vegetable fats were more expensive than butter because price of milk fat was subsidised until 90's for national economy and political reasons. Butter consumption was also promoted in many other ways for example by selling butter to the industry or army at reduced price. Later when Finland joined EU in 1995 the EU's school milk promotion project caused a problem because it favoured fatty milks.

Since 1970 the food habits of Finnish people have changed dramatically. Especially the consumption of fruits and vegetables has increased. The fat and salt consumption has decreased. The incidence of coronary heart diseases has reduced by 65-70 %. The effect of different measures were not evaluated.