



**International Stevia Council**  
**Position Paper about the approval of steviol glycosides**  
**as a food additive in Europe**

**Steviol glycosides** are sweet and non-caloric extracts from the leaves of the stevia plant. They represent a global solution for consumers looking for naturally sourced low calories sweetness. Global leading food safety experts, including the European Food Safety Authority, have established that steviol glycosides are safe for all populations to consume and are a suitable sweetening option for people with diabetes.

The recent overwhelming approval of steviol glycosides for use as a food additive in the European Union by the European Commission and by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health is an important step forward in the regulatory process. The proposal for EU legislation on steviol glycosides has now been forwarded to the Council and the European Parliament who will give their final opinion in the coming months. The International Stevia Council welcomes this process and anticipates that consumers in the EU will get the same opportunity as other consumers across the globe to benefit from a sweetener based on natural sources by the end of 2011.

***History of stevia***

Purified stevia extracts come from the Stevia plant - a small herb native to South America whose leaves have been used for centuries by native tribes to sweeten foods and drinks. As a member of the largest family of plants, *Asteraceae* or the “sunflower family”, stevia is related to such herbs and vegetables as chamomile, tarragon, endive and lettuce.

The sweetness found in the stevia plant is released by steeping its dried leaves in water, filtering and separating the liquid from the leaves, and further purifying the plant extract with either water or food grade alcohol – all conventional plant extraction methods.

***A natural solution for the consumers and the food industry***

The food and beverage industry is partnering with stakeholders and decision-makers in efforts to improve the nutritional profiles of the foods and beverages they market. In particular, industry is rising to meet the challenge of reducing added sugars in foods and drinks, a challenge in which the members of the International Stevia Council are actively engaged.

In markets where approved for use, steviol glycosides are proving to be a valuable tool in the food industry. Versatile and stable in a wide array of food products, steviol glycosides are helping to launch good tasting products that are reduced in sugar or are sugar-free in markets where they have been approved for use, such as France, the United States and Australia.





***Stevia is a high quality and safe sweetener***

In the last 5 years leading food safety and regulatory agencies have issued positive safety opinions on the safe use of purified stevia extracts in foods and beverages, including the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the French ANSES, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand and the US FDA. Pre-clinical and clinical studies show it is safe for the general population including people with diabetes, children and pregnant women.

In 2009, France issued a temporary two-year national approval to allow the use of a purified stevia extract, rebaudioside A, as a food additive.

On 14 April 2010, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a positive scientific opinion<sup>i</sup> concluding that steviol glycosides, sweeteners extracted from the stevia plant, are safe for use in food and beverages. EFSA also established an Acceptable Daily intake (ADI)<sup>ii</sup> for their safe consumption, expressed as steviol equivalents, of 4 mg/kg bw/day, the same ADI established by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee of Food Additives (JECFA) in July 2008. EFSA further expressed a concern that, at the maximum use levels proposed in the applications for use, ADI could potentially be exceeded. In response to EFSA's concerns, the applicants of record submitted revised use level proposals to the European Commission which were reviewed and adopted on 4 July 2011 by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health.

***The International Stevia Council awaits the forthcoming EU approval***

The International Stevia Council and its members are closely monitoring the regulatory process in the EU and welcome the recent signals from the European Commission that steviol glycosides will be approved by the end of 2011. This will benefit all stakeholders by providing consumers in the EU with the choice of a natural sourced sweetener in different product ranges.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/1537.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> ADI is an estimate of the amount of a food additive that can be consumed daily over an entire lifetime and is used by toxicologists and regulators to put into proper context the relationship between the doses of a food additive tested in safety studies and the amount people are expected to eat when a food additive is approved for its intended uses.