

LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) FOOD

Trade Consultation Forum
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Consumer Council's study

- Consumer Council released results of its own study on vegetarian meat in August 2019
- Study the GM food label on prepackaged vegetarian meat products
 - A sample was found to be labelled as “GMO FREE”



Background

- Genetically modified (GM) food is any food or food ingredient that is, or is derived from, an organism in which the genetic material has been modified using modern biotechnology
- According to the World Health Organization, GM foods currently available on the international market have passed safety assessments and are not likely to present risks for human health

International scenario of GM food labelling

- In 2011, the Codex Alimentarius Commission stated that governments are free to decide on whether to label foods derived from modern biotechnology, including foods containing GM organisms
- However, it has emphasised that labelling, if pursued, should be carried out in conformity with the texts approved by Codex to avoid potential trade issues

GM food labelling in Hong Kong

- Regulatory impact assessment on implementation of mandatory GM food labelling scheme in 2002
 - Significant cost implications to small and medium enterprises
 - Withdrawal of products from market
- “Guidelines on Voluntary Labelling of Genetically Modified (GM) Food” in 2006
 - Enhance consumers’ knowledge and right to make an informed choice of GM food
 - Support the local trade’s initiative in setting up a voluntary labelling system for GM food

Guidelines on Voluntary Labelling of Genetically Modified (GM) Food

- Purposes

- Set out principles underlying the recommended labelling approaches for GM food
- Provide reference for the trade to make truthful and informative labels in a consumer-friendly manner

- Scope

- Applicable to prepackaged food that contains food or food ingredients known to have a GM counterpart

Key points to note

- Follow the Guidelines to make truthful and informative labels in a consumer-friendly manner
- Positive GM food labelling
 - food items with 5% or more GM materials in their respective ingredient(s)
 - with significant modifications
- Negative GM food labelling
 - should be supported by documentation

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Positive labelling

- Positive GM food labelling
 - Food items with 5% or more GM materials in their respective ingredient(s) should be labelled as “genetically modified”
 - With significant modifications
- Example 1 (For whole food or food with single ingredient)



List of Ingredients:
Corn (genetically modified)

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Positive labelling

- Example 2 (For processed food)



List of Ingredients:
flour, **corn (genetically modified)**,
water...

OR

List of Ingredients:
flour, **corn***, water...

***genetically modified**

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Exemption

- Exemption
 - Food products that do not contain detectable DNA or protein
 - Highly refined food e.g. sugar, oil
 - Highly processed food

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Additional declaration

- Additional declaration on label when –
 - Compositional or nutritional value significantly different from conventional counterpart
 - Level of anti-nutritional factors or natural toxicants significantly different from conventional counterpart
 - Presence of new allergen
 - Change in intended use of the food
 - An animal gene has been introduced

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Additional declaration

- Example (For processed food)



List of Ingredients:
water, **soya bean (genetically modified to contain high oleic acid)**...

OR

List of Ingredients:
water, **soya bean***....

***genetically modified to contain high oleic acid**

Recommended practice for voluntary GM food labelling - Negative labelling

- Negative GM food labelling
 - Not recommended for food without GM counterparts e.g. orange
 - **Not recommended to indicate or imply food as a whole is from non-GM source**
 - **Absolute terms** e.g. “GM free” **are not recommended**
 - Negative GM food labelling should be supported by documentations

Relevant regulations

Section 54 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Part V and VA of Cap. 132) stipulates that all food for sale must be fit for human consumption. This applies equally to GM and conventional food

Section 61 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Part V and VA of Cap. 132) stipulated that no person shall give any food sold by him or display with any food exposed for sale by him, a label, which falsely describes the food

The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132) require that any prepackaged food shall be marked and labelled in the prescribed manner

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