

**FACTSHEET ON
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHEME ON
NUTRITION LABELLING AND NUTRITION CLAIM**

BACKGROUND

Healthy eating is an important determinant of health. Imbalanced diet is associated with some chronic diseases and conditions including obesity, heart diseases, hypertension, diabetes and cancers. Nutrition information on food labels, which works in synchrony with dietary advice on healthy eating, has a significant bearing and impact on public health.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), an international food standard setting agency, established the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling, which recommended that nutrition labelling should be mandatory for foods with nutrition claims. In the last decade, an increasing number of countries have introduced new legislations to regulate nutrition labels. There are in general two approaches, (i) claim-based labelling, that is to mandate the provision of nutrition information wherever there are nutrient-related claims (e.g. the Mainland China, the European Union countries, Japan and Singapore), and (ii) mandatory nutrition labelling for all pre-packaged food (e.g. the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand).

Concerning the number and types of nutrients to be listed in the nutrition label, Codex suggested that energy, carbohydrate, protein and fat should be included. Codex further suggested that other nutrients which are considered to be of local public health significance could also be included. Reviewing the schemes of different countries and regions, some places (e.g. Singapore and the

European Union countries) only require the four main parameters (i.e. energy, carbohydrates, total fat and protein) to be listed in nutrition labels, but others (e.g. the United States and Canada) have an extensive list of fourteen to fifteen nutrients, including trans fat. Trans fats was being recommended to be included in nutrition labelling by the World Health Organization in 2007.

DEVELOPMENT IN HONG KONG

As part of the Government's ongoing efforts to enhance public health and in line with the international trend, the Government has taken active steps to introduce a mandatory nutrition labelling scheme.

To prepare for a new piece of regulation on the mandatory nutrition labelling scheme, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) conducted the followings:

- studied the international situations and conducted local market surveys to find out the percentage of prepackaged food with nutrition claims and/or nutrition labels.
- reviewed the local public health situation and identified the most important and relevant nutrients that are related to chronic diseases.
- assessed the compliance costs and potential health benefits of a nutrition labelling scheme.
- conducted a public consultation and an opinion survey to gauge views of the public.
- held a series of technical meetings with the trade to seek comments and to explain the technical details of the proposal.

After considering all the information collected, the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment: Requirements for Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claim) Regulation 2008 (the Amendment Regulation) was enacted on 28 May 2008. The Amendment Regulation will come into

force on 1 July 2010 after a grace period of about two years.

The Mandatory Nutrition Labelling Scheme

The mandatory nutrition labelling scheme covers both nutrition labelling and nutrition claims, which aims to : -

- (a) facilitate consumers to make informed food choices;
- (b) encourage food manufacturers to apply sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods; and
- (c) regulate misleading or deceptive labels and claims.

Nutrition Labelling

Under the Amendment Regulation, majority of the prepackaged food will have nutrition labels after 1st July 2010. A nutrition label must include the information on energy and seven specified nutrients, namely, protein, carbohydrates, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugars. These specified nutrients were selected upon thorough consideration of the local public health situation with reference to key health statistics, such as ten leading causes of death and prevalence data of chronic diseases. Furthermore, the nutrition label must list the amounts of any claimed nutrients. In case there is a nutrition claim in relation to any type of fat, the amount of cholesterol needs to be listed as well. Additional information on other nutrients may voluntarily be included in the nutrition label provided that such information is not false, misleading or deceptive in any respect of the food.

Nutrition Claim

Nutrition claim includes nutrient content claim, nutrient comparative claim and nutrient function claims. Nutrient content claim describes the energy value or the content level of nutrients contained in a food (e.g. low fat, high fibre),

whereas nutrient comparative claim compares the energy value or the content level of nutrients contained in the same or similar type of food (e.g. “Reduced fat – 25% less than the regular product of the same brand”). Lastly, nutrient function claim describes the physiological role of a nutrient in growth, development and normal functions of the body. (e.g. “Calcium aids in the development of strong bones and teeth”).

Nutrition Labelling Publicity and Education

Providing nutrition information on food labels has been recognised as one of the means to promote health eating. A Task Force on Nutrition Labelling Education comprising representatives from professional organisations, trade, consumers, academia and government departments has been formed to oversee the publicity and education campaign on nutrition labelling.

To tie in with the implementation of the mandatory nutrition labelling scheme, a three-year Nutrition Labelling Publicity and Education Campaign was officially launched in March 2009. The Centre of Food Safety (CFS) of the FEHD has organised a series of publicity and educational activities to drive home the advantages of the nutrition labelling scheme and enhance public understanding on how to read nutrition labels and make use of such information to maintain a healthy diet. These include among others, the Announcement of Public Interest in TV and radio, the release of results of various studies on nutrients in food, the production of a variety of publicity and educational materials, like thematic video, posters, booklets, souvenirs, and the conduct of roving exhibitions and health talks.

To facilitate the food trade to understand and comply with the new scheme, the CFS has also conducted a number of trade facilitation measures, including the distribution of Technical Guidance Notes on Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claims, uploaded frequently asked questions (FAQs) onto the CFS

website, set up telephone enquiry service for the trade, developed a web-based nutrition label calculator and organised workshops for the local trade.

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

June 2009

REFERENCE WEBSITES

Local Websites

Centre for Food Safety

- http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_act/whatsnew_act_19_Nutrition_Labelling_Scheme.html

Centre for Health Protection

- http://www.chp.gov.hk/content.asp?lang=en&info_id=8800&id=25&pid=9
- <http://www.chp.gov.hk/vital.asp?lang=en&pid=10&id=27>

Food and Health Bureau

- http://www.fhb.gov.hk/en/press_and_publications/otherinfo/080215_labelling/labelling.html

Overseas Websites

Codex Alimentarius Commission

- http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/standards/34/CXG_002e.pdf

Food Standards Australia and New Zealand

- <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/thecode/industryuserguides/nutritioninformation1406.cfm>

Health Canada

- <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/index-eng.php>

Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China

- <http://www.moh.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/mohwsjdj/s3593/200804/17001.htm>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

- <http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/default.htm>

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority, Singapore

- <http://www.ava.gov.sg/FoodSector/FoodLabelingAdvertisement/>

The European Community

- http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/nutritionlabel/index_en.htm