

# Centre for Food Safety Regional Symposium Food Claims: Truth and Myth

## Food Claims from Consumers' Perspective

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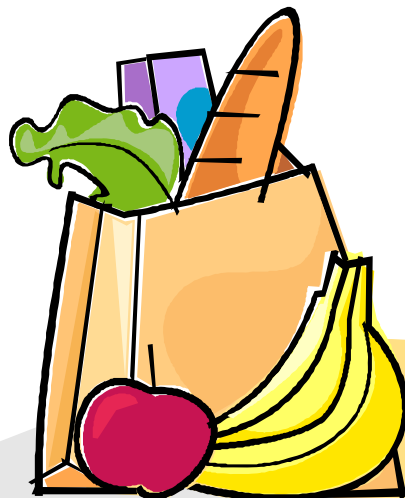
29- 30 October, 2012, Hong Kong

Ms. Connie LAU, JP

Chief Executive  
Hong Kong Consumer Council  
Council & Executive Member,  
Consumers International (CI)

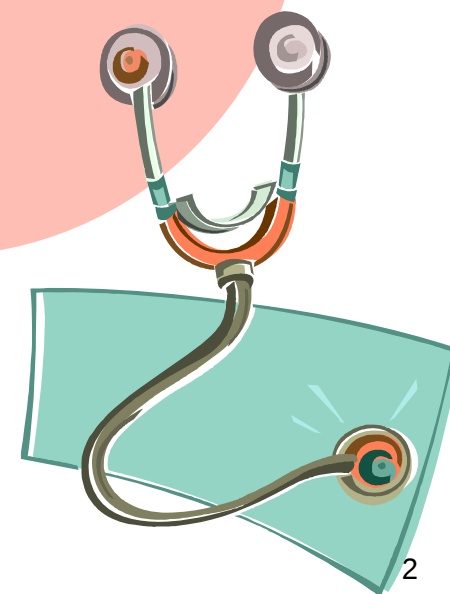


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# Food

# Health



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# Health Claims



all Super Puffs have:

- Iron: 10% of daily value\*  
– for healthy brain development
- Vitamin E: 15% of daily value\*  
– a powerful antioxidant
- Zinc: 15% of daily value\* – to help support a healthy immune system



and includes thiamin (Vitamin B1) which is an essential nutrient for growing babies.

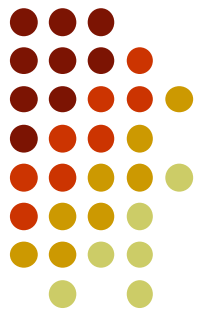


Excellent Source of Iron, Calcium, and B Vitamins for Healthy Growth and Development



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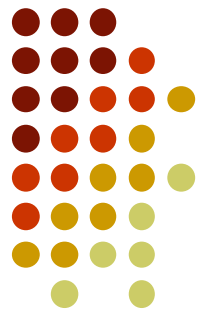
# Overview



- How much **trust** consumers can place in the claims?
- Are **marketing strategies** used to promote the claims suitable?
- **Appropriate regulatory response?**



# Consumers' Expectations



- The ability for consumers to make informed decisions relies on two rights:
  - The right to be informed
  - The right to consumer education





Government

Consumer  
Advocates

Consumer Education

Information

Marketing Campaigns  
Product Labelling

Trade

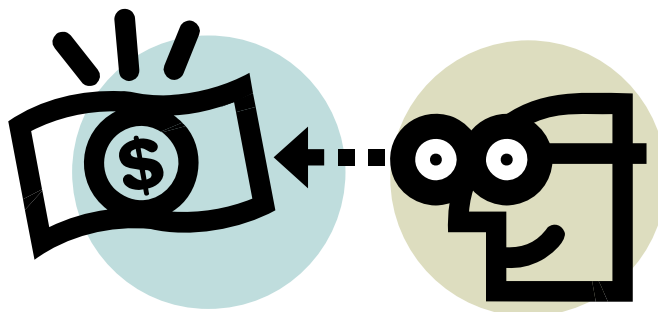


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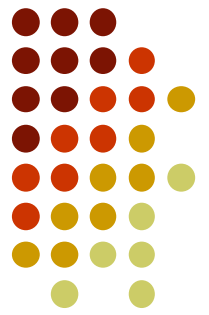
**Short** term business:  
Relies on  
**misinformation** and  
**creating confusion**

**Long** term business:  
Information is  
**true** and  
can be **substantiated**



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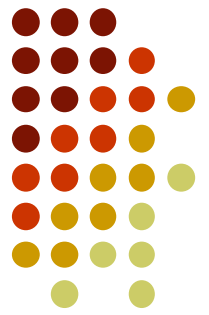
# Health and Food Claims



- Aspects to food claims that CC examines closely:
  - Claims about health
  - Claims about nutrient content
  - Claims that deny or withhold information on the existence of certain ingredients/products



# Health and Food Claims



- Particular claims that CC is especially interested in:
  - **Health benefits**
  - Nutrient contents
  - GM foods
  - Organic foods
  - Artificial colours, preservatives, sugars, etc.



# Recent CC Action – Baby Foods



- April 2012
- Nutrition labelling and related claims
- Food being marketed for babies and young children under 3 years of age
- 117 samples were surveyed
- Cereals, teething rusks, rice cracker, biscuits, canned pureed baby food



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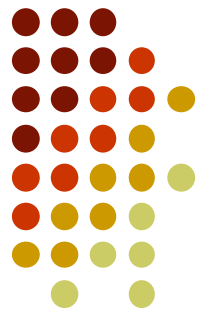
# Recent CC Action – Baby Foods



- Health claims which were not supported by internationally recognized scientific evidence:
  - Vitamin E and immune system
  - Choline and eye development
  - Probiotic and immunity
  - Probiotic and allergies



# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas

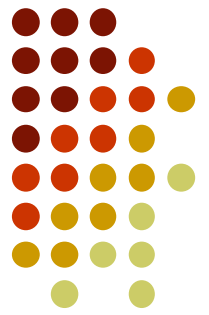


- November 2011
- 18 Follow-up formulas  
(for infants from 6 months up)  
were sampled for  
examination of their heavily  
promoted ingredients and  
related health claims



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# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas

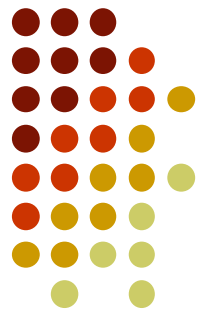


- Probiotics, prebiotics/soluble dietary fibres, DHA, AA:
  - Claims highly exaggerated or misleading
  - Not essential in formulas according to CODEX standards
  - Clinical efficacy and whether they should be routinely added to formulas need confirmation



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# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas

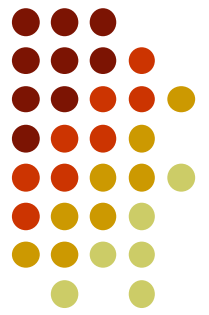


- Soluble dietary fibres:
  - Capable of alleviating the problem of constipation for infants?
  - Inappropriate claims
  - Parents should not rely on this to deal with infant bowel problems



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# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas



- **Phospholipid**

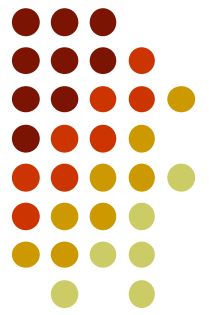
PhD

Learning?

There is **insufficient evidence** to prove that **phospholipid** has specific beneficial effect on the **mental development** of infants and young children.



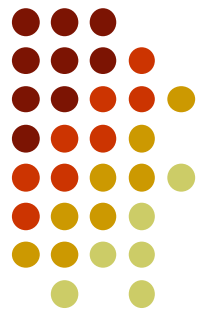
# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas



- Formulas for “Picky Eaters”:
  - Misleading
  - Picky eating behaviour could not be simply treated with “picky eaters” formulas
  - Problem could be worsen if parents merely relied on the formulas to treat the child’s problem



# Recent CC Action – Infant Follow-up Formulas



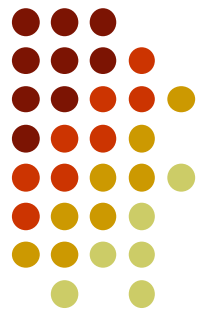
- Formulas available on market are **nutritionally similar** across all manufacturers
- Breast milk is the best food for babies
- Parents should **disregard the claims** made by manufacturers
- Use formulas together with a **balanced diet**



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# Recent CC Action – Genetically Modified (GM) Foods



- September 2011
- 50 soy bean beverages, half had traces of GM soy bean materials
- Some labelled as “orgainc” or “made with non GM soy beans”
- 4 samples contained quantifiable amounts of GM soy bean materials but 2 bore the claims of “Non-GMO”



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# Recent CC Action – Organic Foods



有機食物與一般非有機食物在外觀上沒有明顯分別，消費者須憑認證標籤來分辨。



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# Recent CC Action – Organic Foods



- In March 2010, a vegetable stall owner pleaded guilty to a charge under TDO of supplying vegetables falsely claimed to have organic authentication
- A HKORC survey showed that only about 10% of the surveyed stalls in wet markets claiming to sell organic vegetables could provide organic certifications



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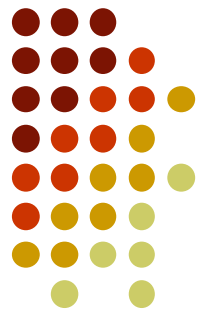
# Appropriate Regulation



- Current Regulations:
  - Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance
  - Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations
  - Industry Guidelines
- What is the appropriate level of regulation?
  - Needs to be addressed on a continuing basis
  - Consumers' perspective: It is the duty of Government to ensure that satisfactory controls exist



# Appropriate Regulation – Baby Foods and Infant Formulas

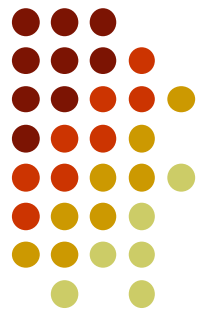


- Prohibit exaggerated and misleading claims made by baby food and infant milk formula suppliers
- Regulate against advertising or promoting breast-milk substitutes, including infant formulas and follow up formulas



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# Appropriate Regulation – GM Foods and Organic Foods



- GM Food
  - Implement a mandatory GM food labelling system
- Organic Food
  - Establish an official organic label



美國



台灣



中國



日本

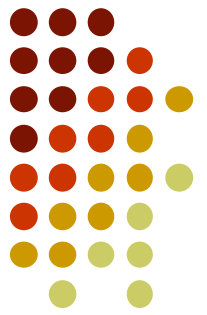


歐盟



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# Conclusion

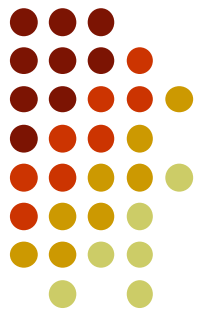


We are what we eat

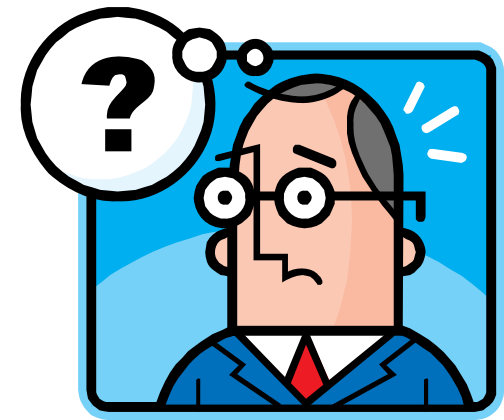


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# Conclusion



## What exactly am I eating?



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# Thank you!



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