

# **UPDATES ON OVERSEAS PRACTICE ON NUTRITION INFORMATION ON FOOD LABELS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the turn of the century, the relationship between lifestyle habits and chronic diseases has increasingly become a focus of public attention. Healthy eating practices play direct and important roles in maintaining and improving one's health status. Nutrition labelling is one of the effective tools in educating the public on healthy eating. For consumer protection, information should be presented in an accurate and clear manner. Simple and easy-to-understand nutrition information should be made available to consumers to allow them making healthy food choices.

2. Recognizing the importance of nutrition labelling as a public health tool, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) and many food authorities worldwide have established guidelines or regulations on nutrition labelling for consumer protection. The purposes of the Codex Guidelines are:

- To provide the consumer with information about a food so that a wise choice of food can be made;
- To provide a means for conveying information of the nutrient content of a food on the label;
- To encourage the use of sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods which would benefit public health;
- To provide the opportunity to include supplementary nutrition information on the label;
- To ensure that nutrition labelling does not describe a product or present information about it which is in any way false, misleading, deceptive or insignificant in any manner; and

- To ensure that no nutritional claims are made without nutrition labelling.

3. We summarized the practice of nutrition labelling of Codex and eight countries/regions in the Consultation Paper on Labelling Scheme on Nutrition Information released in November 2003. There are a host of other countries/areas with nutrition labelling schemes. This brief intends to provide an update on the latest development of overseas nutrition labelling.

### **APPROACHES AND CONTENTS OF NUTRITION LABELLING**

4. Currently, over forty countries/regions have a nutrition labelling programme in place. Under the Codex guidelines on nutrition labelling, a certain degree of flexibility is allowed in setting different national standards. As a result, NL schemes around the world have different coverage/scopes. Three general approaches can be identified, namely mandatory nutrition labelling for all prepackaged foods; mandatory nutrition labelling for specified foods and food with claims; and mandatory nutrition labelling for prepackaged foods with claims (Annex I). Besides the above differences, the number and types of core nutrient information required are also varied (Annex II).

### **SUMMARY**

5. More and more food/health authorities recognize the importance of nutrition information in public health promotion; and more and more companies recognize the importance of nutrition information in product marketing. Thus, nutrition labelling has gained popularity over the past years. Many countries/areas without a nutrition labelling scheme are trying to keep up with the international scene (e.g., the Mainland) by developing one. For those with such

a scheme, many of them are reviewing their existing scheme and modify them whenever necessary so as to meet their public health needs (i.e., the European Community, the USA [requiring the listing of transfat in 2006]). It is clear that the provision of nutrition information on prepackaged foods is a worldwide trend.

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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**Approaches in Nutrition Labelling Regulations**

Mandatory nutrition labelling for all prepackaged foods : -

1. Argentina (2006)
2. Australia (2002)
3. Brazil (2001)
4. Canada (2005)
5. Israel (1993)
6. New Zealand (2002)
7. Paraguay (2006)
8. The United States of America (1994)
9. Uruguay (2006)

Mandatory nutrition labelling for specified foods and prepackaged foods with claims : -

1. Malaysia (2003)
2. Thailand (1998)
3. Korea (2003)
4. Taiwan (2003)

Mandatory nutrition labelling for prepackaged foods with claims : -

1. Brunei Darussalam
2. Chile
3. Ecuador
4. The European Community (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom) [under review]
5. Hungary (only for energy)
6. Indonesia
7. Japan

8. Mexico
9. Philippine
10. Singapore
11. South Africa
12. Switzerland
13. Thailand
14. Vietnam

\* It is noted that the Mainland issued a consultation document in October 2004 proposing mandatory nutrition labelling for all general prepackaged foods. Currently, nutrition information on prepackaged foods for *special dietary uses* is subject to control under the General standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods for Special Dietary Uses (GB 13432-2004) in the Mainland.

Region / Country	Energy, Protein, Carbohydrate, Fat	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Sugars	Dietary Fibre	Cholesterol	Other Nutrients	No. of Nutrients Required for Listing
<b>Codex</b>	✓						Any other nutrient considered to be relevant for maintaining a good nutritional status Claimed nutrients	4
<b>Israel</b>	✓							4
<b>U.S.A.</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fat calories; Vitamin A; Vitamin C; Iron; Calcium; Transfat (2006) Claimed nutrients	14 15 (2006)
<b>Brazil</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓		Transfat Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Australia &amp; New Zealand</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓			Claimed nutrients	7
<b>Canada</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Vitamin A; Vitamin C; Iron; Calcium; Transfat Claimed nutrients	14
<b>Argentina</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓		Transfat Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Paraguay</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓		Transfat Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Uruguay</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓		Transfat Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Malaysia</b>	✓						Claimed nutrients	4
<b>Thailand</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fat calories; Vitamin A; Vitamin B1; Vitamin B2; Iron; Calcium Claimed nutrients	15
<b>Taiwan</b>	✓		✓				Claimed nutrients	5
<b>European Commission (EC)</b>	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)		Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Singapore</b>	✓	[✓]	[✓]		[✓]	[✓]	Claimed nutrients	8
<b>Japan</b>	✓		✓				Claimed nutrients	5
<b>HK (Proposed)</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Calcium Claimed nutrients	10
<b>Mainland China</b>	✓						Claimed nutrients	4
<b>Mainland China</b>	✓		✓	✓		✓	Calcium Claimed nutrients	8

(✓) EC – If a nutrient-related claim is made for saturated fat, sodium, sugars or dietary fibre, the content of all these nutrients must be declared on the label.

[✓] Singapore – “A handbook on Nutrition Labelling (Singapore)” was issued in 1998. In addition to energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat, it recommends listing of saturated fat, sodium, dietary fibre and cholesterol.

