

LABELLING SNIPPETS

Health claims

- The European Food Safety Authority will scrutinise the scientific evidence about health claims on labels, to produce an authorised list of claims. The idea is that if a claim such as 'keeps bones strong' or 'maintains heart health' appears on a label, consumers will know that there is evidence to back it.
- The Food Standards Agency alone has received more than 2500 claims submitted by food manufacturers.
- The European Commission (EC) is expected to agree a final list of authorised health claims by early 2010.

Ready Steady Go!

- Nutrition labelling is one element of the EC's draft labelling proposal. The draft allows for national schemes, such as the FSA's traffic light approach, to continue.
- An independent evaluation of the three labelling schemes – traffic light, GDA (Guideline Daily Amount) and a mixture of both - in use in the UK is now under way.
- The results of this study will tell the FSA what is working best for consumers and will inform negotiations with the EC.

Ready Meals & Snacks – food labelling



Can you read this?
Is this better?

Can you read this?
Is this better?

Can you read this?
Is this better?

Would it be better to be like this?

EU blows the whistle on small print sizes

Draft regulations on food labelling, just how are manufacturers going to fit it all in?

Pressure on space is a familiar complaint among food manufacturers when it comes to the amount of information required. And on the face of it, new EU food labelling proposals appear to pile on even more pressure.

At the end of January, EU Commissioner for Health Markos Kyprianou recommended that mandatory nutrition labelling should be introduced, including information on calories, saturated and other fats, salt, sugar and carbohydrates.

The proposal is hardly controversial, given that most UK retailers and brand owners already use either the 'traffic light' system endorsed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) or other systems based on guideline daily amounts (GDAs).

But plans to stipulate a minimum print size on food labels are likely to meet stiffer opposition. British Retail Consortium (BRC) director for food Andrew Opie argues: "Proposals to introduce a minimum 3mm font size for labels are a major concern. This wouldn't improve clarity, but would lead to compulsory labelling dominating packs."

"It might also be necessary to make packs larger to fit all the information on."

Now that would be controversial in an environmentally paranoid world. Remember the FSA recommends 10 point wherever possible.

Some, but by no means all, brands and retailers privately consider that strict adherence to the letter of the law, by including legally-required information in whatever point size, is more important than genuine legibility. Others suggest that using different background colours or shading would do more to enhance visibility.

David Embleton, sales and marketing director for Sessions of York's label division, lists the current legally-required information on a pack as the ingredients listing, the weight declaration and the barcode. But data demanded by retailers increasingly takes in allergens and genetically modified (GM) ingredients as well as nutritional summaries, he adds.

Indeed, much of the content which is theoretically optional is now taken for granted by many consumers. "If you didn't have the nutritional information on your product, it would probably not sell," states Embleton. Other pressures on space include pre-printed special offers, which are a big sales feature for retailers and brand owners as they fight it out for market share.

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Senior lecturer in food regulation at Reading University Dr David Jukes believes that retailers would resist any attempts by a supplier to reduce current volumes of discretionary on-pack information. But in fact, he argues, the majority of space used on today's food labels is used for marketing purposes.

"One particular retailer only uses E-numbers on sandwich packs, rather than the full names of all ingredients," states Jukes. "But even with sandwiches the legal information can be fitted into a fairly small space, and ready meals generally have a much larger pack surface."

For those manufacturers which are attempting to increase on-pack information, one solution is the peelable multipage label. "Sessions has produced a lot of these for food, but you have to watch what you put on the second, inner layer. Basic data such as the barcode and ingredients listing have to go on the outside," explains Embleton. Typically, the inner layer tends to be used for secondary consumer communication, such as promotions or recipe ideas.

As coding management specialist Claricom points out the supply chain as a whole is more attuned than ever to the need for accurate information and labelling. Meeting legal requirements such as reliable best-before dates has to top any retailer's list of priorities. But as supply chains try to reduce wastage, maximising

flexibility and availability within those requirements is taking on greater importance.

"Historically, coding was always seen as a packaging operation, but people are increasingly making the link with processing," says Claricom managing director James Butcher. And making that link is an important step on the road to improved flexibility, he argues.

Butcher cites the example of a ready meals manufacturer that produces batches of sauce three times a week. In this case, the shelf-life of product incorporating the sauce, packed on subsequent days, should take the date and time of processing rather than packing as its point of reference.

The potential impact, financial and to reputation, of making mistakes with packaging or coding has never been greater and at the same time, argues Claricom, the risk of making such mistakes is higher. "There has never been more variety of products and packaging in a sector such as ready meals," says Butcher. "And the number of new products and reformulations is also higher than ever."

Using a central Package Coding Management System, specific recipes can be reliably tallied with particular sleeves or cartons. The system checks every barcode during production to ensure that the correct packs are used throughout the run.

Of further possible changes to EU regulations, Jukes says: "Certain consumer groups have been demanding more data on country of origin, animal welfare and GM labelling." But he adds: "In most cases, there are 101 reasons why it would be difficult or costly for all businesses, big and small, to make the change."

Of course, there is nothing to stop retailers continuing to out do each other on the quality and volume of on-pack information. Embleton cites a possible example: "Since 2005, new pharmaceutical packs have had to carry braille. Asda has already trialled it on food packs, and we know we can code in braille on top of standard flexo print in the same pass. We're hoping that Tesco or one of the other major multiples will move this way."

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Ready meals are not among those categories where space is most restricted.

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More allergens protection

- Given the severe health risks that allergens can pose, the EC's draft Labelling Regulations propose that all food containing allergenic substances (such as peanuts, milk, mustard or fish) must be labelled or the presence of the allergen must be clearly indicated in another way.
- This is one step further than the current allergen labelling requirement, which only covers pre-packed food at the consumer level.
- Under the new rules, unpackaged food and food served by restaurants or catering establishments will also have to indicate the presence of allergens.



Traffic lights versus Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA)

	Per serving	GDA
FAT	7.7g	70g
SATURATES	2.0g	20g
SUGAR	42.4g	40g
SALT	2.0g	6g
■ HIGH ■ MEDIUM ■ LOW		

FURTHER INFORMATION

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