

TACD

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Resolution on Simplified Nutrition Labelling

The issue

With the rising incidence of obesity and diet-related diseases across Europe and the United States (U.S.), discussions have recently been taking place in several fora, including the European Platform for Diet, Physical Activity and Health, about the need for a simplified labelling scheme.

TACD has strongly supported full nutrition information on the back of packⁱ, which already exists in the U.S., and which we believe should be made mandatory as part of the European Union's review of the nutrition labelling directive.

TACD now believes that it is also necessary to consider a more simplified system of nutrition labelling that will act as a simpler 'sign-post' for those consumers who are less likely to read the full nutrition information and as an initial guide to the levels of nutrients that are of current public health concern.

The aim of front of pack simplified labelling would be to enable consumers to quickly and easily identify which foods are high in fat, sugar or salt, and which ones are healthier options but also to provide an incentive for food manufacturers to reduce the levels of fat, sugar and salt in their productsⁱⁱ.

Recommendations

TACD believes that a simplified labelling scheme should be based on the following principles:

1. It should be based on scientific criteria developed by experts while also taking into account the need for effective, simple communication and consumer research as to what is the most useful and easy to understand approach;
2. It should be prominent, on the front of pack, and complement the nutrition information on the back of the pack;
3. It should enable consumers to easily make comparisons between different products within a food category, as well as across food categories;

4. No product groups should be excluded *a priori* from a simplified labelling scheme, although the consumer is likely to find it more beneficial for processed foods;
5. It should be mandatory, because a proliferation of supposedly 'simple' corporate labelling schemes in the U.S. and Europe, or nationally developed schemes will only add to consumer confusion;
6. The underlying criteria of such a scheme should be endorsed by an independent body (e.g. EFSA or the U.S. National Academy of Sciences) and a harmonised format should be developed by DG SANCO or the U.S. FDA in consultation with key stakeholders including consumers, industry, public health and communication experts;
7. It should put the nutrition information into context by indicating whether or not a product is high, medium or low in key nutrients as established by scientific research;
8. It should include an interpretative element (i.e. traffic light system indicating the levels of nutrients or the overall nutritional value of food products), in addition to factual information to enable consumers to have an 'at-a-glance' assessment of the nutritional value of the food and a preliminary comparison of products.
9. It should be based on the nutrients that are of most public health significance and, in order to keep the information clear and immediate, it should include a limited number of nutrients including fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.
10. It should be backed up by clear government advice on what to eat for a healthy diet and how to use the labelling scheme;
11. While ultimately developed for pre-packaged food, the scheme should be extended to catering outlets serving standardized menu offerings and its use in other catering outlets should be explored.

ⁱ Resolution Food-08-99 on Nutrition Labelling (www.tacd.org/docs/?id=8) and Resolution Food-14-00 on Misleading Food Labelling, (www.tacd.org/docs/?id=13)

ⁱⁱ See also TACD position papers on Nutrition, Obesity and Diet-related Disease (www.tacd.org/docs/?id=299); Trans Fatty Acids (www.tacd.org/docs/?id=277) and Nutrition Labelling (www.tacd.org/docs/?id=8).