Questions and Answers on Food Information to Consumers

Brussels, 11 December 2014

Today’s consumers, whether shopping on-line or in a supermarket, increasingly want clearer and more understandable food labelling to help them make informed choices on the food they eat. In addition, more and more people suffer from allergies. How is a teenager with a peanut allergy supposed to know what he can eat when dining out with friends? How can someone who wants to reduce their salt intake, know which snack is the best option? How can consumers be assured of the origin of the meat they just bought? New rules to address these sorts of issues and others will apply from 13 December 2014 across the EU.

Was there really a need to change the food labelling legislation?

The current legislation on general food labelling dates back to 1978 and nutrition labelling rules were adopted in 1990. Consumer demands and marketing practices have evolved significantly since then. EU consumers want to be better informed when purchasing food. They want labels that are understandable, accurate and not misleading. After more than three years in the making, the new legislation will help consumers make informed decisions on the food they buy. It could also contribute to a better lifestyle and healthier choices.

What changes can I expect to see from the new labelling scheme?

The new legislation lays down general principles on food labelling. It also provides more specific requirements that include for example:

- Improved legibility of information (minimum font size for mandatory information);
- Clearer and harmonised presentation of allergens for prepacked foods (emphasis by font, style or background colour) in the list of ingredients;
- Mandatory allergen information for non-prepacked food, including restaurants and cafes;
- Requirement of certain nutrition information for majority of prepacked processed foods;
- Mandatory origin information for fresh meat from pigs, sheep, goats and poultry;
- Same labelling requirements for online, distance-selling or buying in a shop;
- List of engineered nanomaterials in the ingredients.
- Specific information on the vegetable origin of refined oils and fats;
- Strengthened rules to prevent misleading practices;
- Indication of substitute ingredient for 'Imitation' foods;
- Clear indication of "formed meat" or "formed fish"; and
- Clear indication of defrosted products.

Will small, illegible information be addressed?

This is a key issue addressed in the new legislation. The rules require that mandatory information must be printed in a minimum font size and voluntary information (e.g. slogans or claims) must not be presented in a way that adversely affects the presentation of the mandatory information. Additional rules on legibility will also be established in the future.

Will the new rules help me to eat more healthily?

In principle, yes. Clearer information on certain important nutritional characteristics of processed foods – energy, fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt – will be provided. This will enable consumers to compare foods before purchasing, helping them to make more informed dietary choices to meet their individual requirements. It will also be possible for information on selected nutrients to be included on the front of the package, which will make it easier for consumers to compare products when shopping.

How are the information needs of people suffering from allergies taken into account?
The new rules strengthen the existing information on certain substances causing allergic reactions or intolerances. The aim is to inform and better protect the health of people with food allergies. Food businesses will need to provide such information on all foods. It is down to the national authorities in EU Member States to decide the means by which such information should be provided.

**What are the food information requirements if I buy food online or through distance-selling?**

The new rules explicitly state that when food is sold via distance communication, most of the mandatory information on the label shall be available before the purchase is concluded. This information shall appear on the material supporting the distance selling (webpage or catalogue) or through other appropriate means. This requirement takes full account of all ways of supplying food to consumers. In other words, information that is to be provided on food labels, is the same regardless of whether the product was bought online, through distance-selling means (for example a catalogue) or in a supermarket.

**Will I be better informed on the origin of my food with the new rules?**

The new rules maintain, in general, the current approach: **country of origin or place of provenance labelling on food is voluntary**, unless its absence could mislead consumers.

The Regulation introduces **mandatory origin labelling** for fresh meat from sheep, goat, poultry and pigs. As of 1 April 2015, with some exemptions, the Member State or third country where the animal was reared and slaughtered will appear on the label of such meats.

For foods bearing origin indications, the country of origin or place of provenance of the main ingredients must also be listed if those ingredients originate from a different place than the declared origin of the finished product. For example, butter churned in Belgium from Danish milk could be labelled as "produced in Belgium from Danish milk." The application of these rules is subject to the adoption of implementing acts which have not yet been adopted by the Commission.

Those rules intend to protect consumers from misleading origin indications and will ensure a level playing field between food business operators.

**How can I know whether I eat an "authentic" and not a "fake" food?**

Counterfeiting of food and drink is a major concern. It can take various forms, such as adulterating a product by dilution or substitution of inferior ingredients or implying a false origin of the product.

The new rules will ensure that when a food is not exactly what it appears to be, relevant information will be provided to prevent consumers from being misled by a certain presentation or appearance. When some ingredients, normally expected to be in the food, have been replaced by others, the substitute ingredients will be labelled prominently on the package and not only in the list of ingredients. For meat and fish products, prominent information will be given on the presence of added water and of any added proteins of different animal origin. In addition, such foods when they give the impression that they are made of a whole piece of meat or fish, although they consist of different pieces combined together, will be labelled as "formed meat" or "formed fish."

For foods implying or indicating a false origin, the new rules set certain criteria to ensure that voluntary origin indications do not mislead consumers. Operators who make origin claims are required to provide further information so that people know where the characterising ingredient of the food actually comes from, not just the last country where the food was processed.

**Will we see the changes on the labels from 13 December 2014?**

Yes, the food industry has had a transitional period of three years to ensure that that rules will come into effect as of 13 December 2014. However, you may still find on the market products labelled with the old rules as the Regulation provides for exhaustion of stocks for foods placed on the market or labelled before 13 December 2014 (Attention: not exhaustion of stocks for labels).

The rules on mandatory nutrition information will only apply from 13 December 2016. When however the nutrition declaration is provided on the labels after 13 December 2014, it shall comply with the rules of the Regulation.

**What should I do if I see a label that does not respect the new rules after 13 December 2014?**

The enforcement of EU labelling rules is entrusted to the Member States and complaints should be addressed to the national competent authorities.

**ANNEX**

**Main innovations introduced by Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011* on the provision of food information to consumers**

*All innovations will start to apply from 13 December 2014 with the exception of mandatory nutrition labelling
**Food concerned** | **Innovation**
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**All foods – Nutrition declaration** | **Mandatory nutrition declaration** from 13 December 2016*  
When the nutrition declaration is provided after 13/12/2014 it should comply with the new rules.  
*Some foods are exempted

**"Allergens" -Prepacked food** |  
"Allergens" shall be indicated in the list of ingredients and shall be emphasised through a typeset that clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the list of ingredients, for example by means of the font style or background colour.

**"Allergens" - Non-prepacked food** | Mandatory allergen information.

**All food – Legibility of labels** |  
- **Minimum font size**  
- Voluntary information shall not be displayed to the detriment of space available for mandatory information.

**Foods sold through distance selling** | Availability of all mandatory food information (except for date marking) before the purchase is concluded on the material supporting the distant selling (without supplementary costs for consumer). All mandatory food information shall be available at the moment of delivery.

**Ingredients in form of engineered nanomaterials in food** | Indication and designation of ingredients:  
- **Mandatory indication of the specific vegetable origin of oils / fats**  
- The expression "fully hydrogenated" or "partly hydrogenated" must accompany the indication of a hydrogenated oil / fat

**Refined oils and fats of vegetable origin** | Mandatory origin labelling for meat of swine, sheep, goat and poultry  
As of 1 April 2015, with some exemptions, the Member State or third country where the animal was reared and slaughtered will appear on the label of such meats.

**Meat other than beef (swine, sheep, goat and poultry)** |  
**Indication of date of freezing or the date of first freezing**  
To be indicated as follows "frozen on day/month/year"

**Frozen meat, frozen meat preparations and frozen unprocessed fishery products** |  
The name of the food should be accompanied by the designation "defrosted"*  
*Some exemptions apply

**Meat products, meat preparations and fishery products containing added proteins as such, including hydrolysed proteins, of a different animal origin.** | The name of the food shall bear an indication of the presence of those proteins and of their origin

**Meat products, meat preparations and fishery products which have the appearance of a cut / joint / slice / fillet / carcase / portion of meat or fish** | The name of the food shall include the indication of the presence of added water when this exceeds 5% of the weight of the finished product

**Meat products, meat preparations and fishery products which may give the impression that they are made of a whole piece of meat or fish, but actually consist of different pieces combined together by other ingredients, including food additives and food enzymes or by other means.** | The name of the food shall be accompanied by the following indication "formed meat" or "formed fish".

**"Imitation foods": Foods in which consumers expect an ingredient or component to be normally used or naturally present but in reality is substituted with another. For example, fake cheese.** | The name of the food of these foods shall be accompanied by a clear indication of the component or the ingredient that has been used for partial or whole substitution.
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