

SanCo Discussion Paper on Nutrition Claims and Functional Claims

Consumers Food Group represents UK organisations concerned with the consumer interest in food and is continuing the role of Consumers in Europe Group (CEG)'s food working party. Because we held our first meeting on the 18th July, we are sending brief comments now and will comment in more detail in the Autumn.

We share the concern expressed in the Commission paper regarding the proliferation of number and type of claims. Consumers who choose foods claimed to be especially nutritious are likely to be taking a specific interest in their health and physical well being, but may not necessarily be well informed about appropriate intake levels. Information on nutrient content and its presentation must be standardised to allow consumers to be able to compare different products. We recommend that nutritional education at both national and European level should promote healthy eating habits.

CEG has called for greater control over the use of claims made about foodstuffs, particularly fortified foods and food supplements, for many years. As the number and range of claims has grown consumers can be left increasingly confused and without sufficient information to assess these objectively. Current legislation is inadequate to deal with the range of claims currently being made about foodstuffs.

Food claims can have a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of consumers. Ideally, we consider that such messages should be limited to objective, measurable aspects of a food which enable consumers to make up their own minds about the health value of a food. Nutrition claims should be clearly defined in terms of the quantitative level of the nutrient present, be consistent between products and be meaningful to consumers.

In relation to health claims, we consider that they should ideally not be permitted. They are hard to justify for individual foods and any potentially useful educational role they might have will be heavily outweighed by their potential to confuse and mislead consumers. Instead, consumers should be encouraged to achieve dietary change by the provision of clear, accurate, simple and comprehensive nutrition information and education - rather than through marketing claims.

However, if a decision is taken to permit health claims then we consider that this should only be under very limited and strict conditions. These should include full

substantiation of any claims made and pre-market approval by an independent committee, such as the SCF, and regulation at EU level to ensure consistency across the single market and to provide a basis for enforcement.

We are opposed to the use of implied claims, for instance via product packaging and product names, which cannot be controlled in this way and can cause confusion.

We support the proposal for specific nutritional labelling that would declare the level of nutrients in a product in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the appropriate Dietary Reference Value. In addition, we consider a study should be carried out to establish the most useful way for consumers to understand such information on labels.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Ann Davison

Consumers food Group
New Address:
Drivers
Elgin Road
Weybridge
KT13 8SN
Tel +44 1932 844273
Fax +44 1932 856252

www.net-consumers.org