

Food composition data and trade

E-Siong Tee

Nutrition Adviser, Ministry of Health Malaysia

Nutrition information on food labels can facilitate trade. Manufacturers can use the labels to inform the consumer of the nutrient profile of a food product. They can use nutrition and health claims to highlight the nutritional quality of their products or the health benefits of certain nutrients or other food components. When presented factually and informatively, nutrition information can promote fair practices in food trade to prevent mislabeling and fraudulent claims. Such information can also be useful from a public health point of view, to assist consumers in adopting healthy dietary practices. Information about the nutritional characteristics of a food can assist consumers in making better food choices. It also encourages the use of nutrition principles when making food choices and in preparing meals.

There are two main types of nutrition information on food labels, namely nutrition labeling and nutrition and health claims. Codex Alimentarius has provided two guidelines to assist governments in establishing national regulations. Details of requirements, conditions and format for nutrition labeling are provided in the Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling. The definitions of the types of claims allowed and the conditions for making these claims are outlined in the Guidelines on Nutrition and Health Claims. There has been increased interest and efforts of authorities to improve regulatory control of nutrition labelling and nutrition and health claims to ensure that such information are factual and appropriately presented. Several countries have adopted Codex guidelines into national food laws.

For truthful nutrition labeling, there is a need for quality data on the composition of the nutrients contained in the food. Similarly, for nutrition and health claims, accurate data on the amounts of the nutrients or food components are needed. For scientific substantiation of the claimed health effects, accurate quantitation of the amounts of these nutrients or components is essential. For regulatory agencies, well-equipped laboratories and well-trained personnel are required for surveillance and enforcement purposes.

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