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Council enables consumers to make healthier dietary choices

The Council today approved¹ a compromise text aimed at ensuring that food labels carry essential information in a clear and legible way ([43/11](#) + [13135/11 ADD 1 REV 1](#)), following a second-reading agreement with the European Parliament. This means that the new regulation is now adopted. The new food labelling rules enter into force 20 days after their publication in the Official Journal of the EU which is expected for the end of November. The vast majority of them become applicable three years after their publication.

The main objective of the new regulation is to enable consumers to make balanced and healthier dietary choices. In order to achieve this, prepacked food must in future be labelled with the energy value and the quantities of fat, saturates, carbohydrates, protein, sugars and salt. As a general principle, the energy value and the amounts of these nutrients (which together form the "**mandatory nutrition declaration**") will have to be expressed per 100g or per 100ml, but can additionally be indicated on a per portion basis. Furthermore, they can also be indicated as a percentage of reference intakes, better known as GDA (Guidelines Daily Amounts). Food business operators can use additional forms of expression or presentation as long as certain conditions are met (e.g. they do not mislead consumers and are supported by evidence of consumer understanding). All elements of the nutrition declaration should appear together in the same field of vision but some of them may be repeated on the "front of pack".

The draft regulation requires labelling to be clear and legible. In order to improve **legibility** the new regulation establishes a minimum font size for the mandatory information of 1.2 mm for the x-height. If the largest surface of a food package is less than 80 cm² the minimum font size is reduced to 0.9 mm.

¹ The decision was taken, without debate, at a session of the Competitiveness Council in Brussels

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The new piece of legislation strengthens the prohibition of misleading information (for example suggesting the presence of a particular ingredient, while in reality an ingredient normally used has been substituted) and requires information to be **accurate, clear, and easy to understand** for the consumer. In the case of foods in which a component or ingredient that consumers expect to be normally used or naturally present has been substituted with a different component or ingredient, the label shall bear - in addition to the list of ingredients - a clear indication of the component or the ingredient that has been used for the partial or whole substitution.

The new piece of legislation extends the **compulsory country of origin labelling** to fresh meat of pork, lamb and poultry. Currently, the indication of the country of origin is compulsory notably for fresh beef (for which a separate piece of legislation was introduced during the BSE crisis), fruits and vegetables, honey, olive oil and where the failure to do so misleads consumers. The Commission must examine within two years after the entry into force of the new regulation the possible extension of the compulsory labelling of the country of origin to meat used as an ingredient. One year later, the Commission must examine the same question with regard to other types of meat (than beef, pork, lamb and poultry), milk, milk used as an ingredient, unprocessed foods, single-ingredient products and ingredients that represent more than 50% of a food.

Alcoholic beverages (including alcopops) containing more than 1,2 % by volume of alcohol are, for the time being, exempted from the obligation to bear a nutrition declaration and a list of ingredients. The Commission must, however, examine within three years after the entry into force of the new regulation whether alcoholic beverages should in future be covered, in particular, by the requirement to indicate the energy value, and make legislative proposals, if appropriate. At the same occasion, the Commission must consider the need to propose a definition of alcopops.

Non-prepacked food would also be exempted from nutrition labelling, unless member states decide otherwise at national level. **Allergens**, however, must always be indicated. On prepacked food, allergens must be included in the list of ingredients and emphasised through a typeset that clearly distinguishes them from the rest of the list of ingredients.

Foods sold by private persons, for example at charity events or local community fairs, fall outside the scope of the new regulation.

The new food labelling rules will become **applicable three years after their publication** in the Official Journal of the EU, except of the mandatory nutrition declaration which must be applied at the latest five years after the regulation has been published.

See also Q&A on the same subject [link](#).