

REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE LABELLING AND ADVERTISING OF FOODSTUFFS

Summary of comments prepared by Dr E Schultz

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Wrong dietary practices are implicated in aggravating malnutrition and in the advancing pandemic of cancer and other non-communicable diseases. Appropriate advertisement and labelling of food can help to mitigate this disaster by promoting informed food choices and by influencing agricultural, industrial and commercial food-related enterprises. Their regulation is therefore of critical importance and is predicated on the cooperation of all stake-holders.

In the comments the following issues are emphasised:

1. review and advisory body – an independent body of experts should be established to review, advise, monitor and evaluate food regulatory policies and outcomes
2. claims – no claims or endorsements should be allowed
3. warnings and cautions – explicit red and amber traffic light signage should be compulsory on foodstuffs with unhealthy and potentially harmful ingredients
4. mandatory display items – all ingredients on all foodstuff should be alphabetically listed according to their names not classes, and in detail including volume/mass
5. tabulated nutritional information should be limited to energy content, macronutrients and salt and the format standardised with a column for warnings and cautions
6. definitions – these should be accurate; alternatives, deletions, modifications, and additions including a working definition of unhealthy food are proposed.
7. guidelines – selected items in the guidelines, a legally non-binding part of the draft regulations, should be incorporated in the regulations themselves and the rest of the items, most of which are either redundant or duplicated, should be scrapped.

The following issues are also discussed: the format of displays to promote accessible and intelligible key messages, recommended language, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, the need to differentiate between labels and advertisements, and the regulation of displays for cultural food preferences and for ecologically friendly messages like locally-sourced.

About the author:

Dr Effie Schultz is a retired medical practitioner with an interest in nutrition and many years experience in a hypertension and diabetes clinic that promoted healthy eating habits.