

Labelling of packaged foods

What does this leaflet cover?

The labelling of food which has been packaged by retailers, wholesalers or manufacturers, for retail sale from premises other than at the place of packing.

What labelling is required?

The labelling requirements are very complex and vary from product to product. There are certain basic requirements for all food labels. They are as follows:

- A food name: this should be the one that is required by law, or a customary name. If neither of these apply, the name must be sufficiently precise to inform a purchaser of the food's true nature, and distinguish it from products with which it could be confused.

(Note: a brand name or fancy name can still be used provided it is not substituted for the proper name.)

- A list of ingredients, in descending order by weight.
- A % quantity indication for certain ingredients or categories of ingredients.
- A 'use by', 'best before' or 'best before end' date, or possibly a lot or batch number.
- Any special storage or use conditions.
- The name and address of manufacturer, packer or seller.
- Place of origin, if its omission could mislead.
- Any instructions that are necessary to use the food.

The above is a brief summary of the requirements. There are specific rules about the details of each of these indications, and the manner in which they are presented, which also need to be followed. For example:

- Should your product contain any additives (such as colours or preservatives), its name or 'E' number must be preceded by the category name of the additive in the ingredients list.
- Certain information, such as the name, quantity declaration and date marking must be in the same field of vision on a label. All the information must be clearly legible and the name must not be interrupted by other words or pictures.

Some products also have specific additional labelling requirements. For example:

- Meat products may require a % water content declaration.
- Jam requires a fruit and sugar (soluble solids) content declaration.
- Chocolate requires a % cocoa solids declaration and Milk Chocolate requires a % Milk solids declaration.
- Beef is required to be labelled with specific origin and traceability information.
- Baby food requires a statement of the minimum age of child for which it is suitable and a specific nutritional declaration.

Other labelling requirements

Specific additional information must be included on the label if it applies to the food. For example:

- From 25th November 2004 specified allergenic ingredients must be indicated in the labelling of prepacked food and alcoholic drinks.
- Alcoholic drinks need to declare their strength (i.e. alc. % vol.).
- Food or ingredients that have been irradiated must be declared and labelled "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation".
- Food or ingredients which contain, consist of or are produced from genetically modified organisms are subject to special labelling requirements (please see our GM foods leaflets).
- Raw milk that has not been heat treated is required to be marked with a warning.
- If food has had its shelf life increased by being packaged in certain gases, it must be marked 'Packaged in a protective atmosphere'.
- Foods which contain sweeteners, both sweeteners and sugar, aspartame or polyols are required to have specific labelling declarations alongside the food name.
- Products consisting of skimmed milk together with non-milk fat, which are not specifically formulated for babies and young children, must be labelled with a warning that the product is not suitable for feeding babies.

Labelling claims

- If a food makes any sort of slimming claim, or that it has extra vitamins or minerals, or is low in some nutrient, some additional information has to be given, including nutritional information which has to be stated in a certain way.
- There are special rules concerning the labelling of food as organic.
- There are guidelines to be followed when words such as 'natural' are used.
- There are additional requirements should an ingredient be given special emphasis.
- There are special considerations relating to the use of illustrations.

Exemptions

There are special provisions for bread, flour confectionery, edible ices and cows milk, which allow some labelling provisions to be reduced and/or for some information to be given on associated notices. This applies where the food is packed by the seller, for sale on the premises from which it is sold or from other premises of his trading under the same name, his market stall or his mobile premises. Please ask for further information if this applies to you.

Other labelling requirements

The food will probably have to be labelled with a quantity marking in metric and it may have to be made up in specific quantities.

This leaflet is not an authoritative interpretation of the law and is intended only for guidance.