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Food Labeling Made Simple

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Background Information

Food labeling in the United States is mandated under two federal agencies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The FDA is responsible for food labeling regulations on all food products except meat and poultry items, which are regulated under FSIS and administrated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The Fair Packaging and Labeling Act of 1966 was passed to help consumers make informative decisions about the product they were purchasing and established general and specific principles for food labeling.

In 1990, Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act. This act amended the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938, allowing regulations to be expressed on food labels.

This new act made nutrition labeling mandatory on most packaged food products. It mandated the FDA to control and set standards for the content and format of the nutrition label on these packages. Food labeling laws apply to all retail sales, including mail orders. The USDA was not included in congressional mandates that followed the FDA's regulations to avoid consumer confusion that may have resulted from having two different nutrition labels on the package. The USDA product package labels are subject to additional requirements under their regulations and bylaws as prescribed by FSIS.

Label Required Information and Format

There are currently two specific areas where required information is to be placed on a food container or package: the principal display panel and information panel.

The Principal Display Panel

The Principal Display Panel (PDP) is usually located at the "front" of the package, the side immediately seen by the consumer when normally stacked or stored. The PDP must include a Product Identity Statement and the Net Quantity of Content declaration (Figure 1).

The PDP is a part of the label graphic that is immediately viewed by consumers for retail sales and must be large enough to contain all required information with clarity and conspicuousness. The size of the PDP determines the total type size required for declaring the net quantity of contents.

The letters must not be more than three times as high as they are wide, and the lettering must contrast with the background to a higher degree, allowing it to be easy to read. Intervening material is not permitted to be between the required labeling information (Table 1).

The size of the PDP is:

- The height multiplied by the width of a rectangular package
- 40 percent of the height multiplied the circumference of a cylindrical container
- 40 percent of the total surface of any other type of container

There are certain areas of a food package that should be excluded in determining sizes for the PDP:

- Tops, bottoms and flanges at the top and bottom of cans
- Shoulders and necks of bottles and jars
- The seal area of flexible film packages

Although the PDP is usually located on the front of the box, a portion of a can's label can be on the top of the container as well. The goal of PDP is to create prominence in the label with type sizes, backgrounds, design layouts and other graphic materials.

There is no specific font size for the name of the product in the package. It has to be of a reasonable size related to the most prominent print on the panel. This allows products to be creative, with a larger variation in types and sizes for the name to be presented in the retail market.

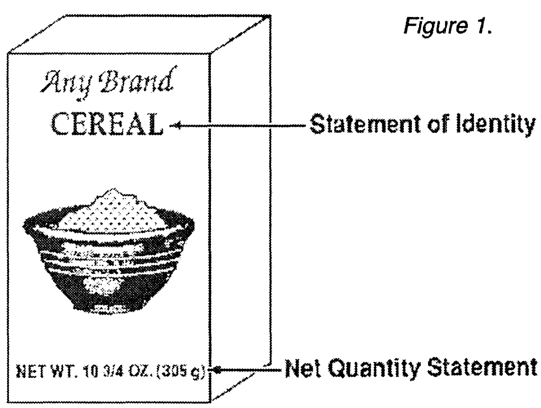

Figure 1.

The PDP can be designed to display the label in more than one location on the container, these being alternate panels. Any information required to appear on a PDP must appear on each alternate PDP. There are no concrete rules in determining if any of the given panels will be an alternate PDP.

Information Panel

The Information Panel (IP) is immediately to the right of the PDP. The information panel should include the ingredient listing, name and address of manufacturer, packer or distributor; number of servings, if used; nutrition fact labeling, if used; warning statements, if needed; disclosure statement; and accompanying information.

The IP should always be directly to the right of the PDP, as displayed by the consumer's viewpoint. However, if this panel is not usable, due to conflicting label design and construction, then the information panel is the next label immediately to the right, usually on the back or bottom of the package (Figure 2).

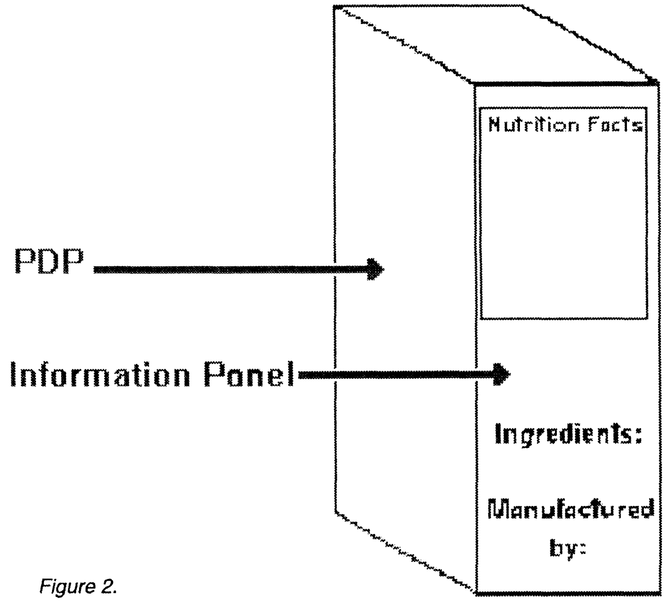

Figure 2.

Ingredient Listing

The ingredient listing on food labels lists all of the ingredients that have been used for that particular food product and is in descending order by the weight of the ingredient. For example, the heaviest ingredient is placed first on the list.

The ingredient list is located on the label panel on the same side, as well as the name and address of the manufacturer, packer or distributor. Therefore, the ingredient list will either be on the information panel or the principal display panel. It also may be above or below the nutrition label and the name and address of the manufacturer, packer or distributor. A type size that is at least one-sixteenth inch in height and easy to read is required.

Manufacturer's Statement

Food labels must include a manufacturer's statement. This statement includes:

1. Name and address of the manufacturer, packer or distributor and be accompanied by a qualifying phrase that states the firm's relation to the product, e.g. manufactured by or distributed by, etc.
2. Street address, if not listed in a current city directory or telephone book.
3. City or town.
4. State (or country if outside the United States).
5. ZIP code (or mailing code used in countries other than the United States).

Nutrition Fact Panel

There is a different type size specified for the nutrition fact label. The heading "Nutrition Facts" must be in the largest type size in the nutrition label. Font must be in a type larger than 8 point, but not exceed 13 point. The font for the "Nutrition Facts" can be in Franklin Gothic Heavy or Helvetica Regular with one point of leading (Figure 3).

The location of the nutrition label is set up with the ingredient list and the name and address on the information panel, which is adjacent to the PDP on the right.

Currently, nutrition facts are not required to be displayed on retail products if, 1) the annual sales of that product are less than $50,000 and 2) sales of all products for that company are less than $500,000. However, an exemption must be filed with the FDA if nutrition information is not provided. Where package size or design prohibits the space required to display nutrition information, contact information to acquire nutrition information must be

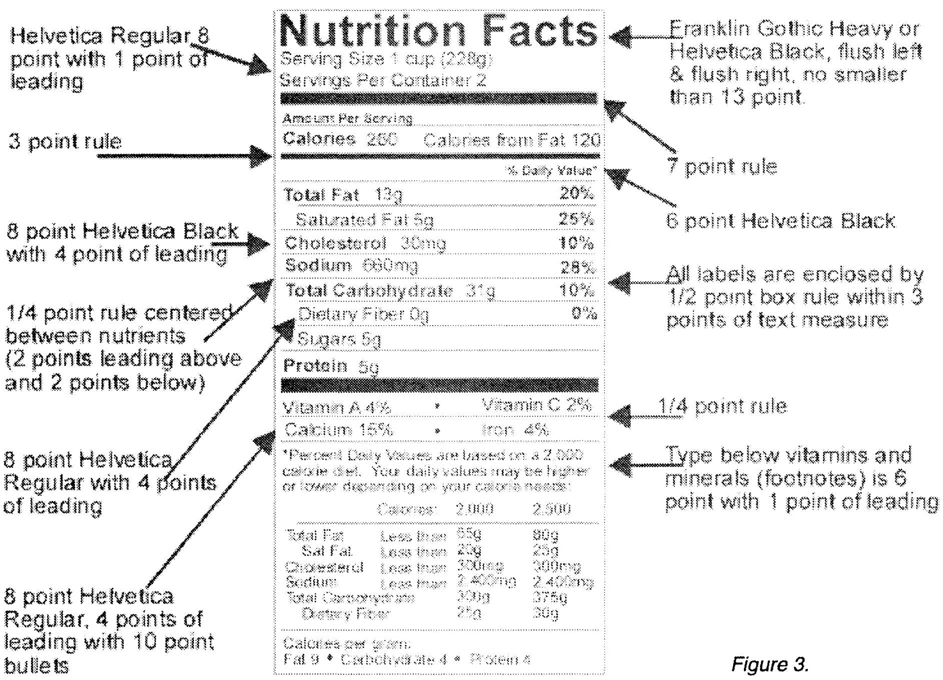

Figure 3.

Table 1. Minimum Height of Numbers and Letters

Area of principal display panel	Min. height of numbers and letters	Min. height; label information blown, formed or molded on surface on container
$\leq$ 32 cm^2	1.6 mm (1/16 in.)	3.2 mm (1/8 in.)
> 32 cm^2 (5 sq. in) $\leq$ 161 cm^2 (25 sq. in.)	3.2 mm (1/8 in.)	4.8 mm (3/16 in.)
> 161 cm^2 (25 sq. in.) $\leq$ 645 cm^2 (100 sq. in.)	4.8 mm (3/16 in.)	6.4 mm (1/4 in.)
> 645 cm^2 (100 sq. in.) > 2,581 cm^2 (400 sq. in.)	6.4 mm (1/4 in.)	7.9 mm (5/16 in.)
> 2,581 cm^2 (400 sq. in.)	12.7 mm (1/2 in.)	14.3 mm (9/16 in.)

Symbols: $\leq$ means less than or equal to; < means less than; > means greater than.
Source: Uniform Packaging and Labeling Regulations, as adopted by The National Conference on Weights and Measurements.

provided. There also are other special situations offered by the FDA, which can be determined on a case by case basis by contacting any of their regional offices.

Other Information

Food labeling laws apply to all retail sales including mail orders. Foreign language food labels must also have English in the title on the label statements. The Nutrition Facts can be bilingual with the other language following in English. It is not required to have the center of origin statement placed under the principal display panel. If a domestic firm's name and address is declared as the firm responsible for distributing the product, then the country of origin statement must appear in close proximity to the name and address and be at least comparable in size of lettering, under the U.S. Department of Treasury regulation laws.

Any warning statements should be placed on the PDP or the IP. It is required to place a warning statement on products that contain saccharin, on self-pressurized containers and some protein-based products.

Presently, food manufactures are not required to place warning labels regarding known allergens such as peanuts or other nuts, since such materials would be identified in the ingredients listings. However, many companies are noting the presence of such ingredients as an added precaution and to convey to consumers that they are food safety conscious. Likewise, products not containing known allergens but produced in a plant that manufactures and other products containing known allergens are carrying warning statements. This is currently not required but voluntary and is a good way for a company to communicate to the consumer the food safety of their products.

Summary

While food-labeling laws can seem complicated, there are resources available to help and guide food companies to meet compliance. For more information or details, refer to the list of references, e-mail authors Chuck Willoughby at cwillou@okstate.edu, Jim Brooks at brookjw@okstate.edu and Corey Stone at stonesc@okstate.edu or call the Food and Agricultural Products Center at (405) 744-6071.

References

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The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Bringing the University to You!

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; home economics; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and based on factual information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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