

January 2007

# FRONT OF PACK NUTRITIONAL LABELLING

## - update

This briefing provides an update on the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) activity on front of pack nutritional labelling to coincide with the launch of its advertising and PR campaign to raise consumer awareness.

### Key points

- The FSA welcomes the positive response received from a number of retailers and manufacturers to its recommended traffic light colour coded approach to front of pack nutritional labelling.
- The following retailers and manufacturers have adopted, or plan to adopt, the FSA's approach: Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Asda, M&S, Budgens, the Co-op, McCain, New Covent Garden Food Company, Bombay Halwa, Britannia Foods and S&B Herba Foods Ltd. Discussions continue with other possible adopters.
- The FSA will be launching new TV, press and poster advertising from 17 January 2007 as part of its activity to raise consumer awareness of front of pack labelling and encourage consumers to use it to help make healthier choices.
- The advertising supplements existing consumer information available on [www.eatwell.gov.uk/trafficlights](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/trafficlights), through a new labelling leaflet and information provided through the publication FSA News.

### Summary background

The FSA Board in March 2006 agreed its recommended approach to front of pack labelling intended to make it easier for people to choose a healthier diet and provide an incentive to businesses to produce foods that are lower in fat, salt and sugar.

The FSA recommends that any front of pack nutritional labelling scheme should be based on the following **four core principles**:

1. separate information on four key nutrients - fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt
2. a red, amber or green (traffic-light) colour to indicate whether the levels of each of the four key nutrients are high, medium or low
3. use of nutritional criteria developed by the FSA to determine the colour code
4. information on the levels of nutrients per portion of product.

These core principles allow retailers and manufacturers the flexibility to develop front of pack designs that suit their own brand image and appeal to their customers.

Additional information, such as on calories or Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) may also be provided. Some consumers do like the extra information that GDAs provide. However, without a traffic light colour code, our research showed that shoppers can't always interpret the information quickly and often find percentages difficult to understand and use.

The FSA recommends that signpost labelling should be used on foods that consumers eat regularly and find most difficult to assess nutritionally, such as: ready meals, breakfast cereals, burgers, sausages, pies, pizzas and sandwiches. Some retailers and manufacturers are applying front of pack labelling to a wider range of products, as they feel this helps their consumers to make more informed dietary choices.

### The science behind the approach

The Agency developed its recommendations for front of pack labelling following extensive research, consultation and engagement with consumers, industry and stakeholders. Part of the consumer research included asking 2,600 shoppers what kind of labelling they liked and, most importantly, what was most effective in helping them to choose healthier foods.

The results of the research were clear: **traffic light colour-coding is key in helping people make healthier choices ‘at a glance’.**

The Agency also held a 12-week consultation with industry and other stakeholders. For further details on the research and consultation process, as well as the nutritional criteria which underpin the high, medium and low (red, amber, green) bands see [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

### ADOPTION OF THE FSA’S RECOMMENDATIONS

The FSA would like all food retailers and manufacturers to adopt traffic light colour coding and welcomes the positive response received from the following retailers and manufacturers who has adopted, or plan to adopt, the Agency’s approach: Sainsbury’s, Waitrose, Asda, M&S, Budgens, the Co-op, McCain, New Covent Garden Food Company, Bombay Halwa, Britannia and S&B Herba Foods Ltd. Discussions continue with other possible adopters.

### Examples of the FSA approach currently in the marketplace

*“As a responsible retailer, we want to provide the right signposting to help our customers make informed choices about what they eat. We use the FSA approach because it is the right thing to do and because our customers tell us that this is what they want.”* **Christian Cull, Marketing Director, Waitrose**



PER 100g	PER PACK
<b>MED</b> Fat	18.5g
<b>MED</b> Saturates	3.1g
<b>MED</b> Salt	2.0g
<b>LOW</b> Sugars	3.6g
<b>Calories</b> 389	

**Waitrose**



Suitable for Freezing				
<b>Calories</b> 160	<b>Low</b> Fat 3.7g	<b>Low</b> Saturates 1.5g	<b>Low</b> Sugars 0.9g	<b>Med</b> Salt 0.7g
approx. per 1/2 pack				

**Co-op**

*“The Co-op has been at the forefront of clear and honest labelling and believes the FSA’s front-of-pack traffic light labelling scheme represents a real step forward in helping consumers understand the nutritional value of foods and its contribution to a balanced diet.”* **Debbie Robinson, General Manger, Retail Brands, The Co-operative Group**

*"We believe that there is a role for both the FSA's traffic light system as well as the GDA labelling system in order to help consumers make informed choices when purchasing food. We value the opinions of our consumers and so we have decided to use both label formats on all our packaging."* **Nick Vermont, Regional CEO, McCain**



**McCain**

	per 135g serving oven cooked	% of GDA
<b>MED</b> FAT	6.6g	9%
<b>LOW</b> SATURATES	0.8g	4%
<b>LOW</b> SUGAR	0.8g	1%
<b>LOW</b> SALT	0.3g	5%



**New Covent Garden Food Company**

*"We opted for the traffic light labelling system because it enables consumers to identify healthier options at a glance and serves to reinforce New Covent Garden soups as a healthy, nutritious choice."* **Andrew Ovens, Group Marketing Manager, New Covent Garden Food Company**

## **RAISING CONSUMER AWARENESS THROUGH ADVERTISING AND PR**

The FSA TV, press and poster advertising will start on 17 January. It is aimed at raising consumer awareness of front of pack labelling and encouraging consumers to use it to help make healthier choices.

The TV advertising will be a series of 10-second advertisements and will run for 4 weeks. It is aimed at women aged 35+ with children; however, most adults in the UK will be exposed to the advertising. The advertising will be evaluated through consumer research.

The press campaign includes a range of national tabloids and women's weekly magazines. A 4-page supplement in The Sun newspaper will highlight how simple it is to shop for healthier options when using the traffic light approach. The poster advertising will appear on sites in and around supermarkets.

## **NEXT STEPS**

It is important to evaluate the impact front of pack nutritional labelling has on consumer behaviour. So, in partnership with industry and other stakeholders, the FSA and the Department of Health are commissioning independent research.

The study will be managed by an independent expert panel, with members having been agreed by the Nutrition Strategy and Steering Group (NSSG). The NSSG is jointly chaired by the FSA's Deirdre Hutton and Public Health Minister, Caroline Flint and is made up of representatives from industry, consumer and health groups.

The FSA is committed to standing by the results of this independent study – and will encourage all of industry to adopt whatever approach is shown to be the most effective in helping shoppers to make healthier food choices.

## SUPPORTERS OF THE FSA'S APPROACH

A large number of consumer, health and medical groups support the FSA's recommended approach, ranging from Netmums to the Royal College of Physicians. See [www.eatwell.gov.uk/trafficlights](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/trafficlights) for a full list of supporters.

**British Heart Foundation – Peter Hollins, Director General:** *“The BHF supports the FSA’s approach to front of pack signpost labelling as it offers instant help to shoppers at the point of sale. We think it is important this information is provided in an easily understood, colour coded format, and from an independent source people can trust, such as the FSA.”* **www.bhf.org.uk**

**National Federation of Women’s Institutes – Fay Mansell, Chair:** *“We have long campaigned for food labelling that is consistent, clear and informative to help consumers make healthier choices. We strongly support clear nutritional labelling on the front of food packs. Research shows that the FSA’s traffic light colour-coded approach is the format most easily understood by consumers, allowing them to make healthy choices quickly.”* **www.womens-institute.co.uk**

**National Consumer Council – Jillian Pitt, Senior Policy Advocate:** *“NCC’s research confirms that consumers are trying to adopt healthier lifestyles and want a standard, colour-coded, at-a-glance front-of-pack labelling system to help them make quick, informed decisions before they buy. The FSA’s traffic light labelling scheme does just does that.”* **www.ncc.org.uk**

**Netmums – Cathy Court, Director of Food & Nutrition:** *“Netmums’ research has shown that parents want clear, honest labelling to help them to choose healthy food for their families. The FSA’s traffic light approach provides exactly that – good, clear, “at a glance” nutritional information that consumers can use to good effect and with very little effort. The FSA is to be congratulated on providing something that really works for busy parents. Netmums looks forward to seeing the scheme adopted by all supermarkets and food manufacturers.”* **www.netmums.com**

**Royal College of Physicians – Professor Ian Gilmore, President:** *“Obesity and unhealthy eating are a real and serious threat to the health of individuals and the Nation. The complex nature of this threat requires a clear and coherent strategy. The Royal College of Physicians welcomes the FSA’s approach to front of pack labelling as a most necessary and practical element of such a strategy. We are impressed by the results of consumer research undertaken by the FSA which indicated that traffic light colours are key to helping consumers make healthier choices. Traffic lights will also undoubtedly assist health professionals when providing advice about healthier lifestyles.”* **www.rcplondon.ac.uk**

### Further information

- <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/trafficlights/>
- Or contact FSA public affairs on 020 7276 8823/8839, email: [public.affairs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:public.affairs@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk)