



FLABEL

Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life

The Challenge

Reviews of consumer research on nutrition labelling have identified a gap in scientific evidence about whether nutrition information on food labels is exerting an effect on healthy food choices among consumers. If there is an effect, it is not known how strong the effect is, under which circumstances it occurs, what factors are responsible for its occurrence, or whether the effect differs between consumer groups.

Project Objective

Comprised of academic experts, retailers, SME-representatives and not-for-profit organisations, the FLABEL research consortium provided this pan-European study on the role that nutrition information plays on food labels. The main objectives of the project were:

- To determine how nutrition information on food labels can affect dietary choices, consumer habits and food-related health issues by developing and applying an interpretation framework incorporating both the label and other factors/influences.
- To provide the scientific basis on use of nutrition information on food labels, including scientific principles for assessing the impact of different food labelling schemes, to be shared with the EU institutions, the food industry, especially SMEs, and other stakeholders.

Key New Knowledge Expected

- Provides the first EU-wide benchmark study on incidence and penetration of nutrition information on food labels, leading to insights into what extent nutrition labelling is actually available in different parts of the EU.
- Generates knowledge on the determinants of consumer attention and reading, liking and understanding of different types of nutrition labels, explicitly dealing with the potential trade-offs between simplicity, completeness and coerciveness of nutrition information on food labels.
- Generates European large-scale knowledge of actual nutrition label use in a real world context, drawing on both store observations and retail scanner data, leading to solid insights into the extent and ways in which nutrition labels have behavioural consequences and affect consumption patterns.
- Provides research evidence on how consumers form opinions about the healthiness of products, and how the nutrition label in-



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EATiP Thematic Area of Relevance

TA1: Product Quality, Consumer Safety and Health

TA2: Technology and Systems

TA3: Managing the Biological Lifecycle

TA4: Sustainable Feed Production

TA5: Integration with the Environment

TA6: Knowledge Management

TA7: Aquatic Animal Health and Welfare

TA8: Socio-Economics and Management

Key Words

Food, Labelling, Nutrition, Consumer behaviour

Project Information

Contract number:

211905

Contract type:

Small or medium-scale focused research project

Research area:

KBBE - Food labelling and consumer behaviour

Duration:

36 months (01/08/2008 – 31/07/2011)

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formation interacts with other information in this process, including media, advertising and school education.

- Addresses the role of nutrition information on food labels in food decision-making in families with children, thus providing evidence on how nutrition labels can be used to positively influence children's dietary intake.
- Develops a research-based best practice proposal for nutrition labelling, and test it in a real-world store environment.
- Set of best practice methods for assessing the impact of nutrition labelling on consumer's product choice.

Potential Impacts



SME

- This project will bring about science-based evidence on how nutrition information on food labels affects consumer behaviour and dietary intake. This evidence has to be turned into actionable implications.



RTD

- Based upon the research findings, an "ideal format" label shall be created and its relevance compared with existing label formats, impact upon frequency of exposure will be tested in an experimental-store environment as will additional cues including product promotions and displays.
- Draft of an EU-wide map of nutrition information of food labels, showing to what extent nutrition labelling is currently available in all MS of the EU, and Turkey



Policy

- Identification and quantification of key determinants of consumers' attention to and reading of food labels (focussing on children and mothers purchasing children products).
- The set of best practice methods for assessing the impact of nutrition labelling could influence existing or upcoming legislation in food labelling policy.



Knowledge Transfer

- The creation of a Stakeholder Advisory Board (SAB) comprising national food agencies, consumer representatives, as well as representatives from the food and retail sectors will help to disseminate the scientific basis on the penetration, use and effects of nutrition labelling in the EU.

Wider societal implications of the project results

Effective and efficient nutrition labelling is important for all stakeholders. For public policy it is about reducing information asymmetry and providing consumers with information that can actively help them in making informed choices and stimulate healthier eating. For consumers, it provides an easy-to-use cue in bringing about more healthy food choices. For consumer associations, it is an important element for ensuring their right to be properly and correctly informed. For retailers and the food industry, nutritional information on food labels is a way to provide consumers with the nutrition information they need to make an informed choice, as well as a way to position and differentiate themselves from their competitors, and to demonstrate good corporate social responsibility. Given the nature of the current legislative environment in which nutrition labelling is vehemently debated, FLABEL will bring concrete objective, pan-European scientific findings, enabling informed decision-making at European and national levels.