

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Paper for Information:

**Food Advisory Committee
Review of Food Labelling 2001**

Agenda Item 2

Further to SACN's discussion of the FAC's Review of Food Labelling Report at the last meeting on 27 March, please see attached letter from Professor Annie Anderson and a reply from Rosemary Hignett from Food Labelling and Standards for information.

Members are requested to note. Comments are welcome.

20/06/02

SACN/02/09

Wednesday, 03 April 2002

Alison Tedstone
Food Standards Agency

Dear Alison

Re: Food Advisory Committee review of food labelling 2001

Following the SACN Meeting I feel strongly about the following two issues:

1. Further consideration should be made about sodium/salt content being added to labelling information (in addition to fat and energy). I cannot think of any other nutrient where 80% is provided by processed foods (not even sugar!) and this statistic alone provides good grounds for labelling. The fact that consumers 'do not add salt to food after cooking' implies a concern to take action on limiting salt intake, but rather a misplaced action. I suspect consumers are not aware of the importance of processed food as a source of sodium and if this information does not appear on labels they might never be aware!
2. I am disappointed that the review on 'eating out' (page 24) does not seem to take account of potential labelling needs in school meals, student meals, canteens and worksites. For many people this type of 'everyday 'eating out'' provides a significant proportion of nutrient intake. We deem free school meals an important part of the welfare food provision but somehow school meals are deemed not important enough to label. This double standard approach must also be queried in relation to 'education about food' (page 29) whereby it is recommended that food-related matters should be addressed in the curriculum. Let us not kid ourselves – food-related matters also need to be addressed in the canteens. If there is concern about the information supplied to young people, let us set a practical example by supplying relevant information in the food choices available in schools.

I trust that these matters will be noted in further discussions on future research relating to food labelling.

Acknowledgement of receipt of this note would be welcome.

Yours sincerely

Professor Annie S Anderson

Professor Annie Anderson
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24 April 2002

Reference:

Dear Professor Anderson

FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE REVIEW OF FOOD LABELLING 2001

I am writing in response to your letter to Alison Tedstone of our Nutrition Division, dated 3 April, outlining your comments on sodium/salt labelling and the review on 'eating out' covered in the FAC Review of Food Labelling 2001. Your letter has been passed to me as this Division deals with policy concerning food labelling and standards. I would like to thank you for forwarding your comments, which have been noted, and hope the following addresses some of your concerns.

1. We agree with the FAC's opinion that nutrition labelling must be made more user friendly to ensure that consumers get the information they want and need to choose a healthy diet. As part of our Food Labelling Action Plan, we are in the process of commissioning consumer research to define the ideal content and format for nutrition labelling. Phase I of this research was completed late last year. The findings suggest various improvements that can be made to the existing nutrition label, including use of less technical terms such as 'salt' rather than 'sodium'. A copy of the research report is available on our website (www.food.gov.uk). The second phase of the research will test out the preferred formats in real life situations. These formats will include salt/sodium content, as well as the values for other 'main'

nutrients, with the aim of raising the profile of salt/sodium levels in foods with the consumer.

2. Research conducted for the Agency has shown that many consumers would like to have more information available when they eat out and that this is a particularly important issue for those with food allergies. The British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) has been commissioned to explore the potential for improvements in the provision of information to consumers in catering establishments, including school and work canteens and similar establishments. Issues that they will be looking at include, as well as presence of allergens, healthy eating information, the use of logos (such as 'vegetarian' symbols), origin labelling and menu descriptions. The BNF will be making suggestions and recommendations to the Agency as to how key issues identified can be taken forward and is expected to report in early summer. The Agency will consult fully on any actions arising from the recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Hignett
Food Labelling & Standards Division

cc Alison Tedstone, Nutrition Division