

FITI: FOOD INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE

New opportunities in food information for the European consumers

Food product labelling currently is at the core of the public debate, as the date of coming into force of Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 (December 2014) is getting close. Demands for food labels tend to become more and more contradictory as these labels have to be concise and readable, contain as much relevant information as possible and have to help consumers to make responsible choices all at the same time. On the other hand online information tools and gadgets are mushrooming and can provide internet users and consumers with new options and possibilities to be informed about food products in addition to, or as an extension of, label information. These developments together create a unique opportunity to rethink the way consumers can be provided with adequate food information in a way that is welcomed not only by them but also by the food industry, government and retail.



In September 2011, the European Parliament and the European Council adopted new legislation to make food labels clearer and more relevant to consumers. Initially, the European Parliament was divided between two approaches: one supporting more detailed information and the other providing simple guidance. The new Regulation [(EU) 1169/2011] includes the expected mandatory information but leaves room for Member States to determine how this information is presented and whether or not additional information should be preferable. This could end up with a variety of approaches and visuals and would mean that both the industry and consumers continue to be treated somewhat differently in the internal market with respect to labelling requirement and information.

A new opportunity for food information: a challenging initiative

The proposed new labelling regulation creates momentum to rethink the way consumers are provided with food

Possible personal preferences

- making healthy choices the easy choice;
- considering specific needs of senior citizens;
- considering the needs of toddlers and infants;
- avoiding nutrient deficiencies (such as osteoporosis);
- providing alerts on the presence of particular ingredients known for causing allergies;
- providing alerts on the presence of ingredients linked to diseases (e.g., sugar for diabetics;) and intolerances (e.g., lactose, gluten);
- the presence of animal product ingredients (for vegetarians and vegans); and
- animal welfare considerations.

information. The aim of this project is to find a balance between information overload and consumer needs for food facts. The information in food labels and otherwise should be easy accessible, clear, factual and objective.

On top of that, the information provided should allow consumers to choose products based on their personal preferences and needs (see the text box above). The project will bring innovative ways to communicate the soon to be legally required information with explanatory and background information in an user-friendly smart phone application (see picture). The prototype of this unique application was developed by Caesar Experts (www.caesar.nl). The aim of FITI is not to restart the



debate or address specific labelling requirements. The approach is practical, easy to understand, based on reliable information, cost-effective, and allowing for informed choices while not being patronising. Digital communication formats currently available and foreseen in the near future are used to meeting the needs of the consumers, the food producing industry and the retail business.

Objective of the project

The project aims at a multi-faceted consumer information approach for all EU consumers that is applicable in all Member States, in their respective languages, and is endorsed by the key players in this field: consumer organisations and national governmental bodies. The European Commission has already expressed its support and so have many members of the European Parliament. The project will bring together through Orange House Partnership (OHP, www.orangeOhouse.eu) the know-how, expertise and experience in the areas of food safety, food fortification, nutrition, food-related diseases and food-related health issues.

Project management

The project will be managed by Orange House Partnership (OHP) with strong support from Bureau Brussels (www.bureaubrussels.eu). OHP is an independent non-profit partnership of senior experts with high level (largely public sector) backgrounds. It has access to the academic community in the EU and beyond and, specifically, it has expertise in food safety, nutrition and food management. This is complemented by the knowledge and expertise of Bureau Brussels in networking, communication and administrative and practical support. The small management team also includes a few advisory members with a background in European (food) affairs, but who are not stakeholders. The management team is in charge of the floor project coordination and ensures that the project stays focussed and meets its objectives.

For more information, please contact:

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