

September 2010 Food Safety News: Labelling Update

About the Current Australian Food Standards Code

The Australian Food Standards Code requires that the majority of food items sold in Australia must comply with specific labelling regulations.

Food labelling informs the consumer of the properties of food offered for sale. The information presented on the label must:

- be visible on the outside of the package;
- be unambiguous; and
- not mislead the consumer.

The food label must identify:

Name for the food which is prescribed by the Code, or a name/description that describes the true nature of the food;

Identification of a 'lot' of the food, prepared under the same condition and during a particular span of time;

Name and street address in Australia or New Zealand of the supplier of the food (e.g. the manufacturer, marketer or importer);

List of the ingredients;

Shelf life of the product, as either a 'use-by' or a 'best before' date;

Directions for use and storage where these are needed for reasons of health and safety or to ensure shelf life are achieved;

Nutrition information panel (NIP), which shows the quantity of the basic nutrients contained in the food, per serving and also per 100g of that food. Certain packaged foods are exempt from the requirement to carry a NIP, e.g. alcoholic beverages, water, herbs and spices, and prepared sandwiches;

Country of origin of the product and its ingredients (see related factsheet Labelling – Country of origin for further details); and

Warning and advisory statements and declaration of the presence of substances which may adversely affect the health of people with allergies and food sensitivities.

The current review of the labelling code

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (Ministerial Council) are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of food labelling law and policy. Public submissions have been received, including those from the various Meals on Wheels Associations throughout Australia. The Panel received more than 550 written submissions, and more than 550 people attended the public consultation forums.

The review is currently considering a proposal to exempt meals on wheels from the labelling code requirements for hot and possibly chilled meals which are for immediate consumption. No exemption would exist for frozen meals as these will not be consumed on the same day of purchase.

Do meals made in a production kitchen have to comply with the labelling code?

Hot and chilled meals consumed cold and to be eaten on the same day of purchase/ delivery do not have to contain all the information required in the AFSC. However, such food must comply with the requirement for the various warning statements required by the Code for safety reasons and also for foods that are genetically modified or irradiated.

For example, hot meals must contain as a minimum the following information:-

Baked Chicken Dinner
Date of Production: 15th February 2010
Use by date: 18th February 2010
Usage instructions: Store refrigerated below 5°C
Contains gluten (flour) and dairy (butter)
Stanley Vale MOW, 15 Cromer Street Stanley Vale, Phone: 6217 0406

Source: NSW Food Authority presentation at the NSW Meals on Wheels Conference May 2010 by Michael Appollonov and www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au

Do commercially available meals distributed by Meals on Wheels have to comply with the labelling code?

All commercially purchased pre-prepared meals must comply with the full labelling requirements of the Australian Food Standards Code.

For Further Information

www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
www.foodstandards.gov.au
www.foodlabellingreview.gov.au