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NUTRITION LABELING — ITS TIME HAS COME

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Meat processors around the country are furiously accumulating nutrition information about their products.

Food Safety and Inspection System (FSIS) officials in the standards and labeling branch are swamped. Label and packaging companies are doing a booming business.

What's at the bottom of all this activity?

By July 6, processed meat and poultry products must comply with provisions of the recently enacted Nutrition and Labeling Act, which require that processed meat and poultry products display labels with specific nutritional information. Companies may choose to use existing "database" information rather than compiling an expensive laboratory analyses for each product. While that would save processors millions of dollars, they must provide records and current analyses if requested.

There has been some controversy about whether the labels will be effective or an unnecessary, costly government mandate. But the bottom line is that consumers want nutritional information about the products they purchase. Such labeling should make diet planning easier for those who are genuinely concerned about the health and

well-being of their families.

For instance, if a 2,000-calorie diet is consumed, nutritional guidelines say that no more than 30 percent of these calories should come from fat. Those 600 calories would be derived from 65 grams of fat in the product. Information on the new food labels make it relatively simple to count grams of fat. What information will the labels include?

The goal of the legislation is to "clear up consumer confusion and encourage product innovation to reflect new knowledge in nutritional science about nutrients that are of public concern." Some of the terms you need to know to read these new labels include:

- Reference daily intake (RDI) replaces RDA (recommended daily allowance). The values currently are the same, but revisions are under way.

- Daily reference values (DRV) provide desirable dietary goals for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, potassium, sodium, total carbohydrate, protein, and dietary fiber.

- Daily values (DV) are derived from RDIs and DRVs and provide the information upon which "percentage information on the nutrition label is based." Values are based on a 2,000-calorie daily intake. This may be about right for most consumers, but others must understand that their specific values may differ from the standard values.

- Reference amount. These are the "amounts customarily consumed per eating occasion" (serving size). Although there is a difference between serving size and



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reference amount, it was determined that servings must be to the nearest whole piece, such as a slice, link, or patty (in the case of meat products).

While this information should be helpful, consumers must remember to read carefully. For instance, the Reference Amount for typical frankfurters — commonly 16 franks to the pound — is 56 grams (2 ounces), since the serving size is two franks. However, if the franks are larger (for example, "stadium franks," which are typically 10 to the pound), the serving size is only one frank, and the Reference Amount becomes 45 grams.

A total of 14 nutrients are required on the standard nutritional label. These are to be listed as normal units (i.e., calories, grams, or milligrams) as appropriate, and as a percent of the Daily Value (%DV): total calories, calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. The declaration of other nutrients — such as soluble fiber, potassium, and other essential vitamins and minerals — is optional.

Exemptions From Labeling Regulations

Because the USDA has decided that labeling would provide a financial burden for small businesses, meat processing firms with an annual production of less than 100,000 pounds of product and 500 or fewer employees are exempt from the new labeling regulation (so long as their product labels bear no nutritional claims or nutrition information).

Other labeling exemptions include meat products that are intended for further processing, are sold to restaurants, weigh one-half ounce or less, are intended for export, are packaged in ready-to-portion or portioned at retail establishments, are multi-ingredient, or are processed at retail establishments.

Although raw, single-ingredient meat, fish, and poultry products are also exempt, the USDA is strongly encouraging retail establishments to voluntarily provide point-of-purchase nutrition information on at least 45 of the most common retail products.

Some things to remember about meat labels:

- Fat and cholesterol are the least understood nutrients. Most consumers have little idea about the relationship between dietary cholesterol and serum cholesterol, and many are confused about "true but misleading" claims. While the new labeling may help some consumers

identify the hidden sources of fat in their diets, it may be misunderstood by others.

- Single-food items should not be classified as "good" or "bad." Because meats contain only fat and protein, a relatively high amount of calories will necessarily come from fat. Remember, the guideline recommends that no more than 30 percent of total calories consumed daily should come from fat. Some of the foods you eat will have less fat and others will have more, but overall, if you consume 2,000 calories, no more than 30 percent of these calories should come from fat (equivalent to 65 grams). Labeling will make it easier to plan for these differences.

- Because FDA wants to standardize all foods, some meat products will be forced to change common references to absolute amounts for certain nutrients. That means that ground beef currently labeled "extra-lean" (10 percent fat) will simply be labeled "lean." To earn the extra-lean label, the fat must be reduced to less than 5 percent.

- To benefit consumers and enhance the perception of their products, some processors are lowering both fat and sodium.

There is no question that many consumers want nutritional information. But will the complex label format and changes from more traditional terminology provide that information or just confuse consumers? Only time will tell.

NC+ Hybrids Works To Find Corn Borer Resistance

HASTINGS, Neb. — NC+ Hybrids researchers are examining both conventional and biotechnological ways of establishing resistance to European corn borer, according to Lonnie Hester, NC+ corn research manager.

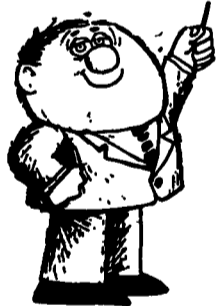
"While we continue to do screening and testing for natural corn borer resistance, we are also working with companies that are involved in gene transfer to accomplish corn borer resistance," Hester said.

Hester said that biotech firms working to transfer the Bt gene from *Bacillus thuringiensis* that produces the toxic effect against corn borer into the corn plant, have a good chance of success.

"We maintain testing and working relationships with as many of

those companies as possible," Hester said. "And we expect the material to be available to us at some point. We will then have to breed the outside material into our lines. That's why we are researching which of our lines have the best natural resistance."

Two studies under way at the NC+ Research Center near Hastings, Neb., are aimed at identifying hybrids with natural resistance. The studies are in the third year. In addition to their research application, the studies also are designed to provide agronomic information to NC+ sales staff and customers, according to Doug Volkmer, corn breeder and project coordinator.



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