

**Important Suggestions / Recommendations By Participants At
The International Seminar on
Nutrition Labeling and Health Claims
Organized by
ILSI-INDIA and ILSI-HNI**

The Seminar held in Mumbai, covered five Sessions on different subjects on 2nd and 3rd November 2001 and was inaugurated by Mrs Rupa Shah Vice-Chancellor SNDT Women's University. It was attended by experts from academia, R&D organizations, Central Government, State Government and industry.

From the presentations made it was apparent that in most countries nutrition labeling is not mandatory except in respect of foods for special dietary uses and when nutrition claims are made.

Health claims cannot easily be substantiated and in most countries they are not allowed because of genuine concerns of the regulators. Presently there are only 5 countries which have legislated on health claims. Even when health claims are permitted they can merely draw attention to reduction of risk rather than suggest prevention or cure of disease.

The distinction between foods and drugs is getting increasingly blurred. Even so, for the present, a clear line of demarcation needs to be drawn to enable effective regulation and prevent abuse.

Nutrition labeling should be related to nutrition policy and, to begin with, should be limited to select foods. As the consumer becomes more aware and educated the list of foods for labeling can be enlarged. In other words, a step by step approach is likely to be more successful. Misleading claims and unsubstantiated claims are prohibited in all countries.

Nutrition labeling is addressed to the consumer and should therefore be intelligible to him. Nutrition content should therefore be expressed as percentage of RDAs/DVRs. Attention should also be paid to bioavailability and not merely to nutrition content in food.

Nutrition contents per serving is more easily understood by the consumer. But since servings would differ from country to country, harmonization of labeling regulations internationally would be possible if they are expressed as percentage of 100 grams.

Although each country has to design its own legislation, a reference point in formulating such legislation is Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling. Issues discussed at the Codex Meetings are of genuine concern for Indian industry. Industry representatives can also bring their unique perspective and scientific

expertise to Codex issues. It is, therefore, suggested that representatives of industry be included in the 'shadow committee' and at the meetings of the Codex Committee.

Government should bring out a handbook giving instructions as to how to label foods. This will help bring about uniformity, clarity and simplicity in labeling and avoid confusion.

When nutrition claims are made enforcement becomes necessary to prevent misuse. Hence a monitoring and enforcement agency becomes inevitable to protect consumer interests. Equally, consumer organizations should themselves challenge misleading information.

Consumer education is vital. It is also necessary that medical and paramedical personnel should receive continued medical education to be able to advise people on the basis of updated scientific information.

Industry associations could work on consumer education with the assistance of R & D organizations and in accordance with proper guidelines given by the Government.

The regulations in respect of nutrition labeling should not be ad hoc or opinionated. Before the Government of India takes a final decision on amendment to Section 32A of PFA all the stakeholders including consumers, industry, R & D institutions and Government should be involved in arriving at consensus, keeping in view the principal objective of promoting public health.

To begin with, a small task force should be set up consisting of representatives of ILSI-INDIA and R & D organizations to draw up a complete proposal for consideration of Government. The FAO agreed to offer support to ILSI-INDIA for convening such a task force