

FOOD PACKAGING AND LABELING

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Back in the days of open cracker barrels in grocery stores, the purchaser could inspect and often sample the food. With more and more packaged food coming to market the buyer must depend upon illustrations and printed information as clues to the inside of the package.

What Is a Package?

The package conveys, protects and displays products from the farm, through marketing channels, to your home. Foils, film bags, glass, paperboard, cans and plastics are used in the packaging of almost every food commodity. For each \$20 spent on groceries, the packaging costs from \$1.50 to \$2.

What Should a Package Do?

A package should identify and give information about the product. In the self-service stores, the package and its label are the "salesman"—the link between the manufacturer and the family shopper. As new products and different forms of old products are developed, new packages and labels help sell

them. These many packages may cause confusion for some shoppers.

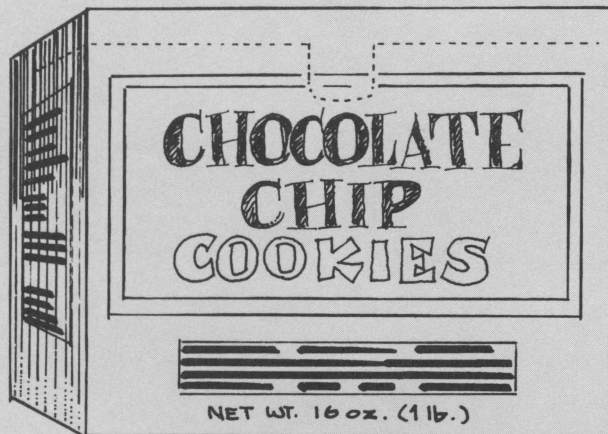
The *Fair Packaging and Labeling Act of 1966* was passed by Congress to insure accurate information as to quantity and to make value comparisons possible. This law applies to all food and laundry products, except meat and meat product and poultry and poultry products already regulated by law. Although mandatory compliance of the law was July 1, 1968, the law also provided for time extensions on an individual basis.

Label Requirements

Name, address and zip code of the manufacturer, packer or distributor are required on all labels.

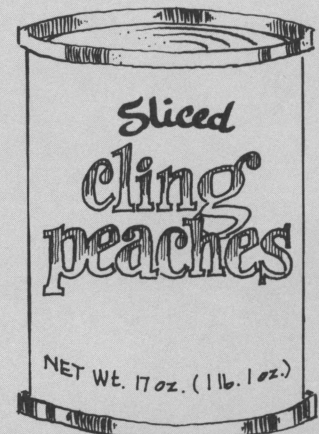
The product must be identified by its common or usual name. If offered in more than one form (sliced, whole, etc.), the particular form must be stated, shown by illustration or be visible through the package.

The law requires double labeling of contents. Packages of 1 pound or more and less than 4 pounds



Name
and form
of product

Net
contents



must give net contents in terms of total ounces, followed by a statement of pounds and ounces.

Packages containing 1 pint or more and less than 1 gallon also must have the contents stated two ways:

Net contents — 56 fluid ounces
(1 qt. 1½ pt.)
or
Net contents — 56 fluid ounces
(1 qt. 1 pt. 8 oz.)

The total number of ounces is listed first, making it easier to compare prices per ounce of products in various package sizes. For example, comparison of the cost per ounce of dry powdered milk in 9, 20 and 47-ounce size packages is possible. Net quantity a package contains is located on the display side of the label, parallel to the base on which the package usually rests.

If the manufacturer states the number of servings in the package (optional), he also must give the size of each serving in terms of common measures.

Example: 2 servings.....3 oz. each
or
2 servings.....½ cup each
or
2 servings.....4 tbsp. each

Use of descriptive words which tend to exaggerate the amount of food in a package, such as "jumbo pound" or "giant quart" are prohibited.

Half empty containers (slack-filled) are banned, unless the extra air space or packaging materials are essential to protect the product or are required by the packaging machinery.

Bargain-price promotions, such as "cents-off" (cents-off from what?), will be regulated on a case-by-case basis.

When the net quantity of a package is changed, the new package, for a reasonable period, shall show clearly that the quantity has been changed.

Packaging Practices

A familiar size package may be reduced in quantity. Increased product costs to the manufacturer may be compensated for by a reduction in quantity, rather than an increase in price to the consumer. Look for the net weight on the label *each* time you buy.

The common pint bottle sometimes is replaced by one that holds 13, 14 or 15 ounces. The "quart bottle" may now contain 27, 28 or 30 ounces. Often the bottle looks the same. And, almost invariably, the price remains the same. But cost per ounce may have increased.

Can sizes have grown smaller. The No. 2 size that once was most popular held 20 ounces. Then the No. 303 (holding 16 oz.) became the favorite size. Now the 300 size, or 14½ ounces, is gaining popularity.

Boxes are about the easiest of all packaging to manipulate. By changing the dimensions of the box or just by changing the color and design a reduction in size can be masked.

Does Packaging Increase Food Cost?

Food packaging costs are increasing but this may or may not affect total cost of a product. The total cost of some food items may be less because modern processing and packaging help reduce handling, transportation weight and labor costs.

What Is Your Responsibility?

Be an informed consumer. New regulations on packages and their labels provide more precise information, but using this information in making value judgements is up to you. When you buy a package, you cast your vote in favor of it.