

FACT SHEET

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FOOD PACKAGING AND LABELING CAN HELP YOU SHOP



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In self-service grocery stores, the package and its label are the "salesman," the link between the manufacturer and you, the family shopper. With the increase in packaged food, you are more dependent upon pictures and printed label information for clues to package contents.

A successful package catches the shopper's eye, identifies the product and gives information about the food. If a picture is used, it must truly represent the product in the package. As new products and different forms of old products are developed, the form, color and general appearance of the packages can be big factors in their being accepted or rejected by consumers.

Label Requirements

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

Products must be identified by their common or usual names. If offered in more than one form (sliced, whole, etc.), the particular form must be stated, illustrated or visible through the package.

Federal law requires truthful net weight or volume labeling on packages. On packages containing less than 1 pound or 1 pint, the net weight or volume must be expressed in total ounces or fluid ounces.

On packages of 1 pound but less than 4 pounds, the net weight must be declared in a dual manner with the first expression in total ounces, followed in parenthesis by a statement of pounds and ounces, for example 20 oz. (1 lb., 4 oz.).

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Packages containing at least 1 pint but less than 1 gallon must show the volume and weight.

Examples: Net contents - 56 fl. oz.
(1 qt., 1½ pt.)

or

Net contents - 56 fl. oz.
(1 qt., 1 pt., 8 oz.)

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



name
and form
of product



net
contents

Descriptive words which tend to exaggerate the amount of food in a package, such as "jumbo pound" or "giant quart," are not allowed.

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

Containers or labels marked "cents-off" must show saving over the regular retail price. For exam-

ple, a label may say, "Price marked is 10 cents off the regular price." The label may also (in the usual pricing spot) give the regular price, the represented cents-off and the price to be paid by the consumer.

Example: Regular price ... \$.97
 Cents-off \$.10
 Price \$.87

Manufacturers may compensate for increased costs by reducing the quantity of familiar-sized containers rather than increasing the price. Check the container's net weight each time you buy.

The common pint bottle sometimes is replaced by one holding 13, 14 or 15 ounces. What looks like a quart bottle may only contain 27, 28 or 30 ounces. If the total price remains the same, the cost per ounce increases.

Can sizes have grown smaller. The No. 2 size (20 ounces) lost out in consumer popularity to the No. 303 can (16 ounces). Use of the No. 200 size, which contains 14½ ounces, is gaining increased acceptance by consumers.

Boxes are the easiest packaging form to manipulate. A reduction in the size of a box can be masked by changing dimensions, color or design.

Presently, fats and oils must be identified on food labels as being of animal, vegetable or marine origin (or in some cases, only as "shortening"). A regulation has been passed requiring that after January 1, 1978, fats and oils be listed on product labels by name, for example "cottonseed oil," "corn oil," "soybean oil" or "beef fat." The term "vegetable oil" or "vegetable shortening" could still be used on the label, but only if followed by identification of the specific oil or oils used, for example: "Vegetable Oil (Soybean)." Some products on the market already have this type identification on the label.

More specific labeling of fats and oils will make it possible, when necessary, to restrict certain products from the diet. It will also make it easier to select fats and oils preferred for health or religious reasons.

Labeling, Pricing, Coding

More than 55 percent of food consumed annually is canned, frozen, combined or processed, whereas diets before World War II consisted mostly of fresh foods. Information which helps in comparing values and determining food quality is included in standardized labeling, nutrition labeling, unit pricing and open dating.

When the ingredients of a food product are given on the label, they are listed in decreasing order of amount by weight. A label without the ingredients listed indicates that the product conforms to a standard of identity (recipe) for that product. More than 200 foods, including mayonnaise and several canned fruits and vegetables, have an established standard of identity.

Labeling emphasis in the past has been in identifying the product and its ingredients. Today, emphasis is also on identifying nutrient values of foods.

Foods that have been enriched or fortified, and all foods for which a nutrition claim is made, must have nutrition information on the labels. Other foods are not required to provide the nutritional information but may voluntarily do so.

Nutrition labeling must conform to a uniform format, with the nutrients always listed in the same order. This makes it easier for shoppers to compare labels as to nutritional value. It can also assist shoppers in buying an assortment of foods to provide a healthful amount of each of the nutrients listed.

This is the minimum information that must appear on a nutrition label:

NUTRITION INFORMATION (PER SERVING)	
SERVING SIZE = 1 OZ.	
SERVINGS PER CONTAINER = 12	
CALORIES	110
PROTEIN	2 GRAMS
CARBOHYDRATE	24 GRAMS
FAT	0 GRAM
PERCENTAGE OF U.S. RECOMMENDED DAILY ALLOWANCES (U.S. RDA)*	
PROTEIN	2
THIAMIN	8
NIACIN	2
*Contains less than 2 percent of U.S. RDA for Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Riboflavin, Calcium and Iron.	

Unit pricing gives the price for a single unit of weight, measure or count of the product so consumers can compare prices for single units of different sizes. In stores where unit pricing is used, shelf tags are the most common method of posting unit prices. This does not replace the pricing of individual items, however.

Open dates on perishable and semi-perishable food products are simply dates that can be read and understood by the consumer. Open-dating on food products does not guarantee their freshness to specific dates. Treatment a product receives from processor to supermarket to dinner table has as much to do with its quality and freshness as does the processing date or the product's life expectancy. Open-code dating provides an easy way for retailers and consumers to rotate foods so the oldest are used first.

Universal Product Codes (UPC) are becoming more familiar. These patterns of black vertical lines

are appearing on many items, no matter how small the label or the type of package used. Universal Product Codes are designed as part of a new computerized system to speed up supermarket checkouts and give greater accuracy, efficiency and economy to both consumers and the industry. The UPC gives each product its own computer-readable label that distinguishes it from all other products. The first five digits in the code identify the manufacturer and the second five digits identify each product of that manufacturer. You may not yet have a computerized checkout system in your neighborhood supermarket, but it is coming.



Packaging Costs

Packaging for \$50 worth of groceries costs \$6 to \$7. Although food packaging costs are increasing, the total cost of some items may decrease as modern processing and packaging reduce handling, transportation and labor costs.

For example, most fresh carrots are now marketed without tops. Having the tops removed at the point of production results in lower transportation costs, easier handling and tastier carrots.

Consumer Approval

You, the consumer, have a great deal to say about the products a grocer offers. You cast your vote in favor of an item by buying it. If a food item does not fulfill your needs, do not buy it. A store cannot afford to keep food items that do not gain consumer approval; competition for shelf space is too great. Remember, label information does little good unless you use it.

Additional information is available from the following Texas Agricultural Extension Service publications:

- L-1077, *Consumer's Guide to the Food Store*
- L-1078, *Standards and Grades Can Help You Shop*
- L-1171, *Unit Pricing and Open Dating*
- L-1245, *We Want You to Know About Nutrition Labels on Food*

Also refer to:

"Shoppers Guide," *1974 Yearbook of Agriculture*, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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