

**For discussion
on 13 April 2010**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Implementation of the Nutrition Labelling Scheme

PURPOSE

1. This paper briefs Members on preparatory actions taken by the Administration for implementing the Nutrition Labelling Scheme (the Scheme).

BACKGROUND

2. The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment: Requirements for Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claim) Regulation 2008 (the Amendment Regulation)¹ will come into force on 1 July 2010. Education must come hand in hand with the new law to realise the benefits of the Scheme for consumers. Since the passage of the Amendment Regulation by the Legislative Council in mid-2008, the Administration has been employing a wide range of publicity and education means to enhance the public understanding of the Scheme. The Administration has also implemented a series of measures to facilitate compliance with the Scheme by the trade, and maintained close communication through different channels, including the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee (BFAC) and its Retail Task Force, as well as various forums/meetings.

PUBLICITY AND EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Objectives

3. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) launched a Publicity and Education Campaign on Nutrition Labelling (the Campaign) in March 2009.

¹ The Nutrition Labelling Scheme requires all prepackaged food to label the content of energy plus seven nutrients, namely: (i) protein, (ii) carbohydrates, (iii) total fat, (iv) saturated fat, (v) trans fat, (vi) sodium and (vii) sugars, as well as any nutrient for which a claim is made, and regulates nutrition claims.

The three-year Campaign is divided into three phases :

- (a) to raise public awareness in Phase I (June 2008 – July 2009);
- (b) to enhance understanding of the Scheme in Phase II (August 2009 – June 2010), and;
- (c) to motivate behavioural changes in Phase III (July 2010 – June 2011).

Activities

4. In Phase I and II, CFS raised public awareness of the Scheme through organising group briefing sessions, roving exhibitions, health talks and Food Safety Day 2009, announcement of study results on nutrients in food and launching of mass media programmes. A series of educational and publicity material has also been produced. Besides, CFS has developed a teaching kit and organised train-the-trainer workshops for educational partners (e.g. dietitians, secondary school teachers, non-governmental organisations and patient groups) in order to encourage and assist these educational partners to work together in promoting nutrition labelling.

5. To encourage the public to choose healthy food and achieve a balanced diet by making use of nutrition labels, CFS collaborated with the Consumer Council, for example, in carrying out a study last year to assess the nutrient content, especially sugar content, in prepackaged non-alcoholic beverages in Hong Kong and its effect on health, so as to encourage consumers to pay attention to the sugar content information on nutrition label in making a wise decision.

6. CFS and the Consumer Council will jointly publish a series of articles on nutrition labelling in the Choice Magazine to facilitate the public in making good use of nutrition labels in choosing prepackaged food products. The launching article features instant noodles. The study, which was released in the March issue, looked into the nutrition label information of 48 instant noodle samples, in particular, their sodium, total fats and saturated fats contents are examined.

7. Web-based platforms (including Yahoo! and MSN) are also used to promote nutrition labelling to the younger generation. To widely publicise the

commencement of the new law, CFS will undertake territory-wide promotional programmes such as Food Safety Day 2010, TV and Radio Announcements of Public Interest, brief radio programmes and posters in public transport and public housing estates. In addition, CFS will strengthen the co-operation with food retailers and encourage their active participation in various educational and publicity activities in retail outlets (such as displaying posters and distributing pamphlets), and will organise a competition on nutrition labelling for secondary school students.

Evaluation

8. The Task Force on Nutrition Labelling Education has been assessing the Campaign through quantitative indicators (e.g. number of people visiting websites / attending workshops, number of publicity materials distributed) to evaluate its effectiveness. To provide a benchmark for comparison, a baseline survey was conducted in the summer of 2008 to assess public knowledge, attitude and practice regarding nutrition labelling. In 2011 (i.e. after the completion of the whole Campaign), CFS will conduct another survey for comparison with the baseline survey to evaluate the changes in public knowledge, attitude and practice regarding nutrition labelling.

TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES

9. On top of the regular liaison channels, CFS has established a Working Group on Nutrition Labelling Scheme in November 2009 to discuss issues such as law enforcement, laboratory support, details on the application for small volume exemption (SVE) and the coverage of prepackaged food, etc. The trade generally considered that with the introduction of measures like SVE, nutrient testing support etc, the impact of the Scheme on food trade and food choice has already been largely reduced than expected. The suppliers trade pointed out in February that more than 80% of the products had already carried nutrition labels. Representatives of laboratories also indicated that they had sufficient capacity to provide testing services to the trade.

MARKET SURVEY

10. In order to understand the impact of the Scheme on food choice of consumers, CFS has commissioned an independent consultant to find out the

quantity of different types of prepackaged food products available in various retail outlets before and after the commencement of the Scheme, and to assess the change in market situation. Furthermore, the surveys will assess the quantity of prepackaged food products that comply with the Scheme before 1 July 2010 and its subsequent changes.

11. The first and second surveys were conducted from October 2009 to January 2010 and in March 2010 respectively. According to the survey results, the consultant estimated that there were a total of 73 000 prepackaged food products in the market that would be regulated by the Amendment Regulation. Among the 2 360 prepackaged food products randomly selected, the first survey found that 47% had either already complied with the requirement in the Amendment Regulation, or had already obtained SVE; and in the second survey this figure further increased to 57%. The third survey will be conducted in April 2011, and we expect to complete the whole survey project by the end of 2011. CFS will keep close contact with the trade in this regard.

12. The trade has also made assessment on the number of prepackaged food products withdrawing from Hong Kong after the implementation of the Scheme. At the March BFAC meeting, the Hong Kong Retail Management Association estimated that some 4 000 prepackaged food products would leave the market. The Food Council and the Association of Green Organic at Living conducted a questionnaire survey in February targeting mainly at small and medium food companies. About half of the companies surveyed estimated that none of their products would be delisted from market due to the implementation of the Scheme while about 20% of the food companies surveyed estimated that 0-5% of their products would leave the market after the Scheme is implemented. In addition, nearly 30% of the companies surveyed indicated that all of their products had already complied with the requirement of the Scheme, and over 50% of the companies surveyed indicated that more than 80% of their products had complied with the requirement of the Scheme.

13. All in all, the survey results revealed that the Scheme has not brought much impact to the food trade and quantity of prepackaged food products. As regards the compliance with the new law, the trade is primarily ready and the food choice of consumers has not been unduly limited. CFS has also set up telephone hotline to answer enquiries on various aspects of the Scheme, including enquiry for general information as well as specific enquiries,

such as relating to SVE and the problems that may be encountered by the food trade in complying with the law.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note and comment on the preparatory work undertaken by the Administration for the implementation of the Scheme.

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Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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April 2010**