

# BRIEFING NOTE

## Mandatory Front-of-Package (FOP) Labelling for Foods

### INTRODUCTION

On February 10, 2018, proposed regulations amending the Food and Drug Regulations (Nutrition Symbols, Other Labelling Provisions, Partially Hydrogenated Oils and Vitamin D) were posted in Canada Gazette Part I.<sup>1</sup> These proposed regulations are part of the government's Healthy Eating Strategy<sup>2</sup> which also includes revising Canada's Food Guide, restrictions on marketing food and beverages to children and changes to the food label.

The proposed FOP regulations modify the end date of the original transition period for the new nutrition labelling regulations from December 2021 to December 2022. This change would consolidate the compliance dates for nutrition label changes and FOP labelling.

Public consultations on the FOP labelling provided Canadians an opportunity to weigh in on which front-of-package nutrition symbol they will find most useful. Canada Beef's submission on the FOP symbol is in Appendix A and a Quick Reference Summary on FOP Labelling is in Appendix B of this document.

### NUTRIENTS OF CONCERN

Health Canada states saturated fat, sodium and sugars are nutrients of concern based on association with chronic diseases such as diabetes for example. Dietary survey data indicates that Canadians consume these nutrients in excess of recommended limits.<sup>3</sup> The World Health Organization recommends that saturated fat intake not exceed 10% of total energy intake, which is approximately 20 grams per day for a 2000 calorie reference diet.<sup>4</sup>

Health Canada estimates the Canadian population average intake of saturated fat is approximately 10% of energy (20 grams). Based on Canadian consumption patterns, it would appear that saturated fat does not fall into the category of 'nutrients of concern'.

This moderate level of saturated fat intake was identified based on an analysis of the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey data; not the most recent iteration in 2015. This is important since dietary patterns have changed since 2004. Saturated fat consumption may be less than previously understood, which questions the validity of identifying saturated fat as a nutrient of concern.

Furthermore, the science around saturated fat and health outcomes has evolved.<sup>5,6</sup> Heart and Stroke Canada has taken a new position on saturated fat stating "...recommendations do not include a threshold or limit for saturated fat and instead focus on a healthy balanced dietary pattern, which can help Canadians reduce consumption of saturated fats", with a focus on a variety of minimally processed foods, which include lean meats.<sup>7</sup>

The Codex Committee on Food Labelling has identified issues in setting "high in" criteria.<sup>8</sup> One issue is whether to use a nutrient focus and single-cut off versus considering the overall nutrient profile of the food. A single-nutrient approach in defining "high in" levels may be applicable to discretionary foods (energy dense non-nutritive foods) but not to all foods, especially the core foundational foods. Potato chips versus ground beef, for example. Codex is considering whether to exempt nutrient-rich foods and foods that nourish vulnerable groups from "high in" nutrition labelling.

## THRESHOLDS FOR FOP LABELS

FOP labelling will be triggered if the saturated fat, sodium and/or sugars in prepackaged foods represent 15% of the daily value (DV) per reference amount. For example, for ground beef, the amount of saturated fat listed will be based on 100 grams raw ground beef. If the amount of saturated fat in the reference amount exceeds 3 grams, then a FOP label would be required, according to the Health Canada proposal.

## Reference Amounts for FOP Labels Thresholds<sup>A</sup>

Meat Category	Reference Amount <sup>B</sup>	15% DV threshold
Ground beef, raw	100 grams	3 grams saturated fat 350 mg sodium 15 grams sugars
Deli meats – fully cooked	55 grams	
Uncooked sausage	75 grams	
Fully cooked sausage	55 grams	

<sup>A</sup>for prepackaged foods

<sup>B</sup>reference amounts in Schedule M of the Food and Drug Regulations<sup>9</sup>

## EXEMPTIONS FROM FOP LABELLING

The proposed changes to the Food and Drug Regulations do not require single-ingredient foods, like meat, poultry, fish, vegetables and fruit, to carry a Nutrition Facts table. These foods remain exempt; therefore, are excluded from FOP labelling. However, as is currently in the regulations, all ground meats – beef, chicken, turkey, veal, and pork – require a Nutrition Facts table.

## PROPOSED FOP SYMBOLS

The FOP proposal included options for the FOP symbol. The mandated visual will be included in the final Regulation that will be published in the Canada Gazette, Part II, and inserted directly in the Food and Drug Regulations. Of note, a variation of this symbol was included in Health Canada's focus group testing of food guide visuals:



## SUMMARY

Government policy should be developed using the most current consumption data and science available.

The objective to provide quick and easy guidance to encourage consumers to make informed choices, while well-intended, is not achieved in this proposed policy. In fact, some nutrient-poor and highly processed foods would not have to display a FOP label since they do not meet the thresholds for sodium, saturated fat and/or sugars like some cookies, chips and diet soda.

On the other hand, many wholesome, nutritious foods, like ground beef, may be above the threshold for saturated fat and would have to display one. It is a negative approach to dealing with foods that are meant to nourish.

## References:

1. Government of Canada. Regulations Amending Certain Regulations Made Under the Food and Drugs Act (Nutrition Symbols, Other Labelling Provisions, Partially Hydrogenated Oils and Vitamin D), 2018. <http://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p1/2018/2018-02-10/html/reg2-eng.html>.
2. Health Canada. Healthy Eating Strategy, 2016. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/food-nutrition/healthy-eating-strategy.html>.
3. Health Canada. 2015 Evidence review for dietary guidance: Technical report. 2016.
4. World Health Organization. Healthy Diet, 2015 [https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/nutrientrequirements/healthydiet\\_factsheet394.pdf](https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/nutrientrequirements/healthydiet_factsheet394.pdf).
5. Chowdhury R, Warnakula S, Kunutsor S, et al. Association of dietary, circulating, and supplement fatty acids with coronary risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med*. 2014;160(6):398-406.
6. de Souza RJ, Mente A, Maroleanu A, et al. Intake of saturated and trans unsaturated fatty acids and risk of all cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes: systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *BMJ*. 2015;351:h3978.
7. Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation. 2015 Position Statement: Saturated Fat, Heart Disease and Stroke.
8. Codex. 2019 Discussion Paper on Criteria for the Definition of 'High In' Nutritional Descriptors for Fats, Sugars and Sodium. [http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/es/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252Fmeetings%252FCX-714-45%252Fdocuments%252Ff145\\_11e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/es/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252Fmeetings%252FCX-714-45%252Fdocuments%252Ff145_11e.pdf).
9. Government of Canada. Nutrition Labelling - Table of Reference Amounts for Food. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/technical-documents/labelling-requirements/table-reference-amounts-food.html>.

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## Appendix A:

### Canada Beef reply to Health Canada's Front of Pack Label Public Consultation

[https://www.healthyeatingconsultations.ca/front-of-package?utm\\_source=ehq\\_newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=ehq-Health-Canada%E2%80%99s-Food-Front-of-Package-Nutrition-Symbol-Consultation-&utm\\_campaign=website&utm\\_source=ehq&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.healthyeatingconsultations.ca/front-of-package?utm_source=ehq_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ehq-Health-Canada%E2%80%99s-Food-Front-of-Package-Nutrition-Symbol-Consultation-&utm_campaign=website&utm_source=ehq&utm_medium=email)

Submitted by Canada Beef Feb 14 2018

### Process:

- 4 images are presented and you are asked to pick which of the 4 you would prefer to see on pack – you are not given the option to pick NONE and you cannot skip the question.
- You are then asked to explain your preference from a selection of 4 options – of note, you are not allowed to give a comment. You can select more than 1 reason.



### Response:

The image with the magnifying glass was selected as it at least demonstrates one should consider the nutrient in question marked on the label and seems to be less of a 'warning' label. It encourages consideration and thoughtfulness – not dismissal and warning.

### Response Submitted in the Comment Box:

"We should stop villainizing foods based on single nutrients and labelling them with Warning Signs is not going to make a difference to health. The single nutrient focus of nutrition messages in the past has only served to distract us from this far more important issue – we have faulty eating patterns of snacking instead of meals, eating alone, eating on the run, eating portions that are super-sized and skipping meals (like breakfast). We have become over reliant on over-processed foods, with close to 50% of calories for Canadians coming from these foods (according to studies cited by Heart & Stroke). Encouraging and enabling Canadians to cook meals at home with our basic wholesome foods in proper proportions would be a better strategy than nutrient warning labels – nutrient contributions of the food as a whole should be the consideration and healthier eating patterns."

## Appendix B: Quick Reference Summary on FOP Labelling

### Health Canada Front of Pack Labelling Initiative: Impacts on Canadian Beef

#### Overview

- As part of the Health Canada Healthy Eating Strategy initiative, a set of symbols were developed for mandatory placement on the front of packages of food products that are deemed as 'high in' the following specific nutrients: sodium, saturated fat and sugar.
- The objective of the Front of Pack (FOP) program is to provide quick and easy guidance that will aid consumers to make informed choices for selecting 'healthy' foods
- These specific nutrients were identified as being associated with chronic disease and as such are key nutrients of concern.
- The FOP labels are of concern to the food industry as consumers are likely to perceive the labels as a 'warning' rather than an educational tool.
- Public consultations on the FOP labelling were available until April 26, 2018 for Canadians to weigh in on which front-of-package nutrition symbol they would find most useful. Canada Beef's submission on the FOP symbol is detailed in the Appendix of this document.

#### Implications & concerns for Canadian Beef

- Whole muscle cuts are exempt from front of pack regulations as they do not have a Nutrition Facts Table on pack to support the FOP statement. Cuts are too variable to develop a Nutrition Facts Table.
- Since ground beef currently already has a Nutrition Facts Table on pack, ground beef could be required to have a front of pack label for saturated fat, based on the labelling threshold amount.

#### Key Messages

We see the following flaws and shortcomings in the requirement to have FOP labelling on packs of nourishing accessible foods such as ground beef:

- a. Little is known about the effectiveness of FOP to guide consumer choices. What research is available has been deemed to have poor methodology.<sup>1-4</sup> There is little evidence that the FOP will help consumers adopt healthy dietary patterns.
- b. FOP labelling could be a negative approach to foods, stigmatizing them as good or bad, regardless of whether the foods are nutritious or not. SEE TABLE BELOW FOR EXAMPLES OF WHAT FOODS WOULD/WOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO CARRY A FOP LABEL
- c. FOP labelling will encourage Canadians to select their food based on sodium, saturated fat and sugars, while overlooking positive nutrients of concern (zinc, calcium, magnesium, vitamin C, vitamin A, vitamin D, potassium and fibre).<sup>5</sup> This approach could be a negative approach to deal with foods that nourish such as ground beef, cheeses and yogurt.
- d. FOP labelling is telling people what not to eat as opposed to what they should be eating. This approach is not enabling consumers to make healthier choices.
- e. No research has been done in Canada to evaluate consumer reaction in a retail setting. We currently have a robust Nutrition Facts Table already on pack and would an education program to make better use of the NFT be a better investment for health?
- f. Based on the most recent Canadian consumption pattern data (CCHC 2015), the Canadian population average intake of saturated fat is within the guidelines set out by the Joint Expert Consultation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO.<sup>6</sup>  
NOTE: Government should be encouraged to base any new consumer labelling and education initiatives on the results of the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey (released later this year) and not on the outdated survey information from 2004.
- g. The Heart and Stroke Foundation's position statement on saturated fat states that if Canadians eat a healthy, balanced diet and appropriate portions, saturated fat intake should not be an issue.<sup>7</sup>
- h. When it comes to reducing chronic non-communicable diseases, it is important to consider the food source and dietary patterns, rather than focus on the nutrients (sodium, saturated fat and sugars) to limit. Current evidence indicates that saturated fat intake per se is not associated with increased CVD risk.<sup>8,9</sup>

#### References

1. Cecchini M, Warin L. Impact of food labelling systems on food choices and eating behaviours: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized studies. *Obes Rev.* 2016;17(3):201-210.
2. Cooper SL, Pelly FE, Lowe JB. Construct and criterion-related validation of nutrient profiling models: A systematic review of the literature. *Appetite.* 2016;100:26-40.
3. Kleef EV, Dagevos H. The growing role of front-of-pack nutrition profile labelling: a consumer perspective on key issues and controversies. *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr.* 2015;55(3):291-303.
4. Vyth EL, Steenhuis IH, Brandt HE, Roodenburg AJ, Brug J, Seidell JC. Methodological quality of front-of-pack labelling studies: a review plus identification of research challenges. *Nutr Rev.* 2012;70(12):709-720.
5. Health Canada. 2015 Evidence review for dietary guidance: Technical report. 2016.
6. Health Canada. Toward Front-of-Package Nutrition Labels for Canadians. 2016; <http://healthy Canadians.gc.ca/health-system-systeme-sante/consultations/labels-nutrition-etiquetage/document-eng.php>.
7. Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation. Position Statement: Saturated Fat, Heart Disease and Stroke. 2015.
8. Chowdhury R, Warnakula S, Kunutsor S, et al. Association of dietary, circulating, and supplement fatty acids with coronary risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med.* 2014;160(6):398-406.
9. de Souza RJ, Mente A, Maroleanu A, et al. Intake of saturated and trans unsaturated fatty acids and risk of all cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes: systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *BMJ.* 2015;351:h3978.

**Canada Beef Response to Public Consultation:**

“We should stop villainizing foods based on single nutrients and labelling them with Warning Signs is not going to make a difference to health. The single nutrient focus of nutrition messages in the past has only served to distract us from this far more important issue – we have faulty eating patterns of snacking instead of meals, eating alone, eating on the run, eating portions that are super-sized and skipping meals (like breakfast). We have become over reliant on over-processed foods, with close to 50% of calories for Canadians coming from these foods (according to studies cited by Heart & Stroke). Encouraging and enabling Canadians to cook meals at home with our basic wholesome foods in proper proportions would be a better strategy than nutrient warning labels – nutrient contributions of the food as a whole should be the consideration and healthier eating patterns.”

**Example of Some Foods that Would/Would Not Carry a FOP Label\***

Food	Above threshold for sodium	Above threshold for saturated fat	Above threshold for sugar	FOP label
Bear paws soft cookies				NO
Caramel chocolate chip rice cakes				NO
Potato chips, original				NO
Diet soda				NO
Deli roast beef – “Natural Selections”	X			YES
Shaved smoked chicken breast – “Natural Ingredients”	X			YES
Walnuts		X		YES

\* Based on the nutrition facts table and the Canadian Nutrient File.

Brought to you by Canada Beef

