

'Simplified food labeling rules would serve consumers and producers alike' says Business

Written by Ricardo Varanda

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Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 muffin	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 200	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 12g	24%
Saturated Fat 3g	6%
Cholesterol 20mg	4%
Sodium 170mg	34%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	62%
Dietary Fiber 2g	4%
Sugars 1g	2%
Protein 5g	10%

In the framework of a consultation launched by the European Commission on 'Labeling: competitiveness, consumer information and better regulation for the EU', industry stresses the simplification target as a condition to deliver better results to both consumers and business.

According to UEAPME, the European SME employers' organisation, the Commission's plans to revise most of the existing food labeling rules "show the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the current system".

UEAPME welcomed the Commission's approach but submitted a number of suggestions in order to achieve an effective simplification of the system.

Experts from the UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs, representing the majority of food producing enterprises in Europe, suggested that the new labeling regime should at consider some key points such as promotion of consumer education, regulation at national level and consideration of smaller producers' specificities.

They found inappropriate a EU-wide legislation of non pre-packaged food as this production "varies significantly across Member States. They therefore propose that "rules governing labeling of non pre-packaged food should be left within the remit of individual Member States".

As several studies point out that current labels are sometimes not sufficiently understood, producers highlight the need for the "implementation of consumer education campaigns alongside actions on labeling and other forms of product-related information".

UEAPME experts find that “mandatory elements in labels should be kept to a minimum in order to be truly relevant and understandable, while at the same time ensuring consumer safety. All other elements should be voluntary, unless governed either by specific legislation or by self-regulation”.

UEAPME has also drawn the attention for the fact that costs of introducing labeling changes are generally higher for SME food producers, once they produce smaller quantities of varying foodstuffs as they urge the revised labeling rules to take this aspect into account.

"Both consumers and producers are not satisfied with the current labelling schemes, which are not fulfilling their potential", said Ludger Fischer, UEAPME Adviser on Food issues and Co-ordinator of the UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs. "We trust that the Commission will find our comments useful during the revision process, in order to achieve a workable labeling system in the light of better regulation", he concluded.