

USDA Mandates Meat Nutrition Labeling



Meat labeling laws are changing in the United States, and retailers must comply with new labeling standards by March 1, 2012. Nutritional content for the most common cuts of meat must be made accessible to customers. Find out how this affects stores to ensure full compliance with the law.

In December 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced that it will enact a new nutrition labeling rule for the most popular cuts of meat and poultry products. The new law is set to go into effect March 1, 2012. A recent two-month extension provides more time for retailers to take all necessary actions to become fully compliant.

Under this legislation, packages of ground or chopped meat and poultry will feature nutrition facts panels on their labels. Additionally, the 40 most popular cuts of meat and poultry products will require nutrition facts panels either on their package labels or available for consumers at the point-of-sale.

"More and more, busy American families want nutrition information that they can quickly and easily understand," says Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a USDA press release. "We need to do all we can to provide nutrition labels that will help consumers make informed decisions. The USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services work hard to provide the Dietary Guidelines for Americans every five years, and now consumers will have another tool to help them follow these guidelines."

The nutrition facts panel will include the number of calories and the grams of total fat and saturated fat a product contains. Additionally, any product that lists a lean percentage statement, such as "76% lean," on its label also will list its fat percentage.

Effect on retailers

Retailers will need to begin following the new regulation March 1, 2012. This means that the nutrition information of popular cuts must be available to the consumer at the point-of-purchase. There are several methods by which retailers can present the

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nutrition information. Labels may be placed directly on the package, or point-of-purchase materials can be made readily available for consumers within close proximity to the fresh products. Beginning March 1, FSIS will start making their assessments of retailer compliance.

In cases where a nutrition claim is made (“80 % lean, 20% fat”), FSIS will conduct a nutrient analysis to verify the accuracy of the claim, for both ground products and major cuts.

Regardless of whether nutrition information is compiled from approved sources or not, a nutrient analysis will be conducted on all ground or chopped meat products to verify that the information is accurately represented. But for major cuts that can be visually identified by FSIS personnel, a nutritional analysis will not be conducted if that information has already been presented by an approved source.

Compliance

There are several ways to comply with the new regulation. Posters, brochures or signs (printed or electronic) can be displayed at the service counter, meat case or checkout. Print-ready nutritional charts are available from FSIS at www.fsis.usda.gov/Nutrition_Labeling/index.asp [1].

Additionally, on-package labeling offers full compliance, and can be done in-store or at a central packaging location. METTLER TOLEDO offers full support in placing all or some of the nutrition information directly on packages.

Support

All METTLER TOLEDO labeling equipment supports nutrition labeling, from the simplest of counter scales to the most sophisticated wrapping machine. Labels can also be placed on the bottom of packages, covering up less of the product. Additionally, METTLER TOLEDO offers a variety of USDA-approved label formats included with the equipment.

If retailers choose to comply with the regulation by placing labels on packaging, an analysis of the current labeling equipment must follow. The equipment should not only have the capability to print a label, but also needs to be able to print a Nutrifacts panel.

Exemptions

There are several categories of meat and poultry products that are exempt from the new labeling law. Sliced meat products, like those typically found in the deli department, are not included in the scope of this regulation. In addition, these requirements do not apply to seafood.

Other significant exemptions include packages of meat that contain more than one ingredient, such as steak prepared with stuffing or ground beef mixed with cheese and onions. Meat that is custom slaughtered or prepared and meats that are ground

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by the butcher at the customer's request are exempt. Meats sold in packages that are less than 12 square inches need not conform, and ground meat products processed by small businesses (less than 500 employees) are also exempt, although major individual cuts are not exempt from the regulation.

Learn more

The USDA is opening channels of communication for consumers and retailers to gather information and have specific questions answered. The USDA's Director of Labeling and Program Delivery Division, Rosalyn Murphy-Jenkins, has invited producers and retailers seeking further information to contact her directly at (301) 504-0878.

METTLER TOLEDO created a website specifically designed to guide retailers through the legislation, and provide up-to-date information to assist in ensuring full compliance.

Visit www.mt.com/na-nutritionlabeling [2].

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Links:

[1] http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Nutrition_Labeling/index.asp

[2] <http://www.mt.com/na-nutritionlabeling>