



**A Research Study into Consumers'  
Attitudes to Food Labelling**

**December 2009**

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## Introduction

The aim of food labelling is to provide consumers with information which may influence their purchasing decisions. For example, consumers may want to know what ingredients are in a food product, how to cook it, how it should be stored, its best-before or use-by date, its fat content or other nutritional properties.

Detailed, honest and accurate labelling is essential to inform the consumer as to the exact nature and characteristics of the food product, enabling them to make a more informed choice.

In Ireland, the general rules for the labelling of pre-packaged foods are laid out in the European Communities (Labelling, Presentation, and Advertising of Foodstuffs) Regulations, 2002<sup>1</sup> (as amended). The fundamental rule of the labelling legislation is that consumers should not be misled to a material degree.

## Objective

The objective of this study was to establish if consumers understand the various forms of labelling currently presented on foodstuffs and the efficiency of such labels to assist them make informed purchasing choices. Specifically:

1. To ascertain whether or not consumers consider/ consult labels before purchasing food
2. To ascertain if the information on current labelling is sufficient to enable informed purchasing
3. To establish if consumers would like to see more front of pack<sup>2</sup> labelling
4. To establish what consumers would like to see specifically on food labelling
5. To establish how labels (if at all) influence consumers' purchasing decision-making processes, and
6. To ascertain whether or not consumers accrue benefits from the labels.

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 483 of 2002

<sup>2</sup> Nutritional information displayed on the front of food packs is commonly referred to as 'front of pack labelling'

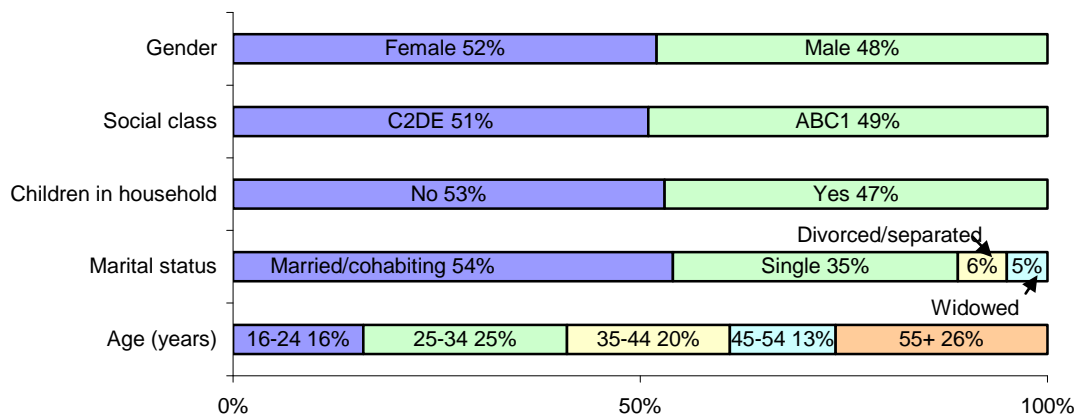
## Methods

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) commissioned Ipsos MORI to investigate consumers' understanding, knowledge and attitudes to food labelling. Two studies were carried out – a quantitative study followed by a qualitative study.

### Quantitative study

A face-to-face survey was carried with 1,021 consumers, aged 16 years and older, across Ireland. Interviews were conducted by Ipsos MORI's staff in February and March, 2009, with interviewers working to Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) standards<sup>3</sup>. Respondents were almost evenly spread according to gender, social class category<sup>4</sup> and covered households which did and did not have children (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Demographic profile of consumers in the quantitative study**  
(n=1,021 for all except 'children in household' where n=1,019 as no answer was given in two cases)



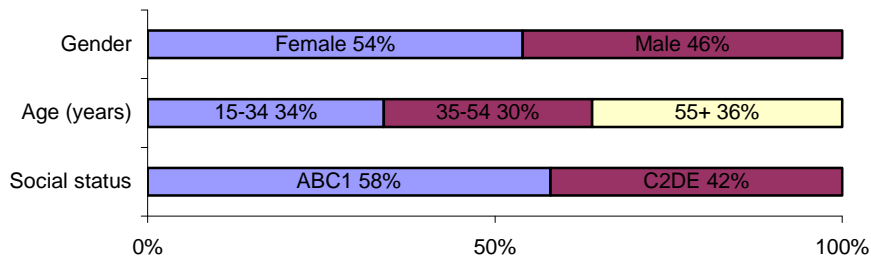
### Qualitative study

In April 2009, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 50 consumers, aged 15 years and older, in a central Dublin location. Respondents were almost evenly split across gender, age and social class category (Figure 2).

<sup>3</sup> ISO 20252:2006 establishes the terms and definitions as well as the service requirements for organizations and professionals conducting market, opinion and social research

<sup>4</sup> ABC1 and C2DE are descriptors of socio-economic background used in social marketing research. ABC1 includes respondents of higher/upper and middle socioeconomic status and C2DE includes respondents from lower middle/lower socioeconomic status

**Figure 2: Demographic profile of consumers in qualitative study (n=50)**



Interviews lasted around 25 minutes and consisted of a simulated shopping exercise, followed by an interview. In the simulated shopping exercise consumers were asked to randomly choose pre-packaged food products from different product categories including, cheese, yoghurts, breakfast cereals, bread, ready-meals, orange juice, fruit and vegetables. The consumer was asked to discuss in detail their views on the products they had chosen, the respective merits of each of the different approaches to labelling on these products, and to identify areas in which they believed the food labels could be improved. Respondents were provided with an incentive of €10 to participate in the exercise.

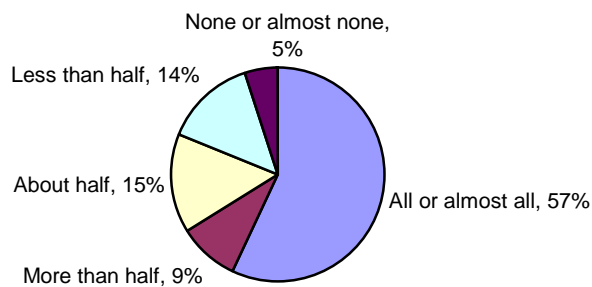
## Results and Discussion

The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies are presented as one cohesive report.

### Purchasing habits

The majority of consumers interviewed in the quantitative survey were involved in food shopping for their household, with two thirds buying more than half of the food shopping. Only 5% (50/1,021) of consumers said that they shopped for none or almost none of the household shopping (Figure 3).

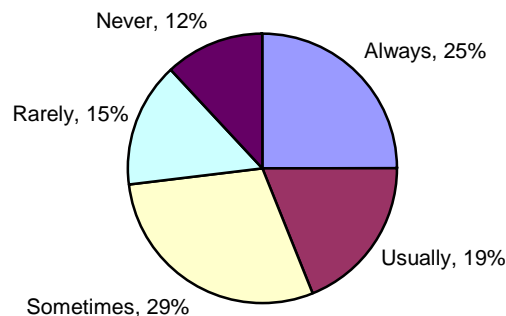
**Figure 3: Proportion of the household food shopping that the consumer personally buys (n=1,021)**



### Do consumers read food labels?

Although one quarter of consumers (253/1,021) said that they *always* consult food labels when shopping for food, 27% (277/1,021) said they *rarely or never* consult them (Figure 4).

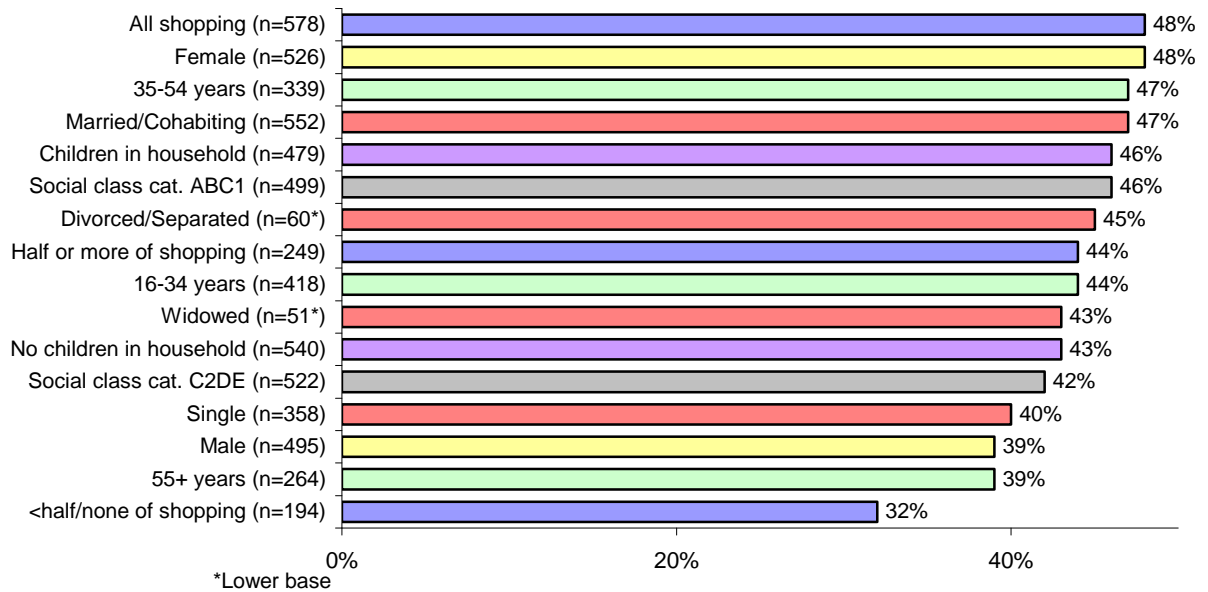
**Figure 4: Frequency with which consumers consult labels when shopping for food (n=1,021)**



The percentage of consumers who always consult food labels has increased to 25% since 2004, when only 8% said they consulted food labels all of the time

(safefood 2007). Most likely to consult food labels were people who shopped for all of the household groceries and females; with 48% of these groups saying that they always or usually consult food labels (Figure 5). Those least likely to consult food labels were people who did little of the household shopping (less than half to none); with 44% of this group saying they rarely or never consult labels.

**Figure 5: Consumers who always or usually consult food labels, by demographic**



The qualitative study revealed that consumers are least likely to consult labels on everyday products such as milk, pasta, juices, and pre-packaged fruit and vegetables. Consumers also said they tend not to consult food labels when buying food they consider to be ‘junk food’, as they acknowledge the product is unhealthy. The main reasons given for not looking at labels were:

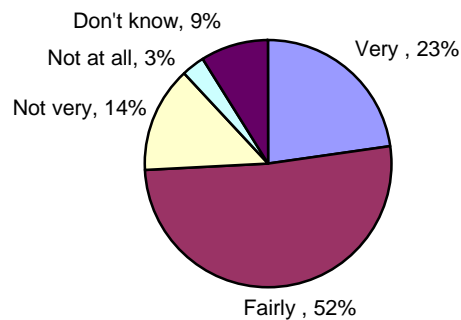
- Habit or brand loyalty (they always buy the same brands)
- Lack of time/too busy
- Lack of understanding of the importance of food labels
- Overwhelmed/confused by too much information on labels
- Too price driven to let labels influence their purchase decisions (e.g. buy in bulk, quantity versus quality)
- No food allergies or intolerances in the family
- Acknowledge a food product is unhealthy and turn a blind eye
- Perception that product choice is healthy (or perceived appearance is fresh)

“I don’t need a label to tell me what to eat, I know about my five portions of veg./fruit a day! And I know that if I buy biscuits it is junk food anyway” (Female, 15-34 years)

## How informative are food labels?

Nearly three quarters (74%; 759/1,021) of consumers said they found food labelling informative (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: How informative consumers consider food labels to be**  
(n=1,021)



In this survey, however, 27% of consumers said they rarely/never consulted food labels, and of this group only 45% (124/277) said they found food labels informative. In contrast, 87% (390/450) of consumers who always/usually read food labels and 84% (245/293) of those who sometimes read food labels said they found food labels informative.

The qualitative study found that consumers generally consider food labels informative, particularly:

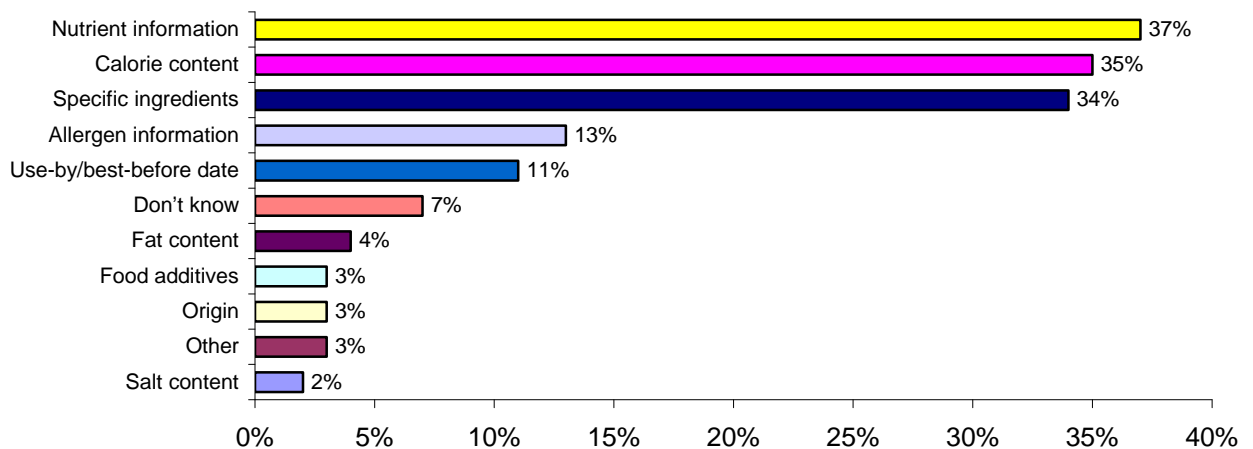
- If it is a new product, or the consumer has never tried it before
- If there are food allergies or intolerances in the family
- If a family member has an illness related to diet, e.g. type II diabetes, high cholesterol, heart conditions
- To determine the use-by or best-before date
- If the consumer is generally health conscious
- If the consumer is on a diet to lose weight
- To identify product variants (e.g. flavours of yoghurts, variety of orange juice – smooth or with bits)
- To determine the country of origin (e.g. desire buy Irish, for traceability or fair trade)
- To determine instructions for use
- To determine if the product is organic or free range
- To determine if the product is suitable for vegetarians
- For religious reasons (e.g. to avoid pork)



## Why do consumers consult food labels?

When the consumers who found food labelling informative were asked 'Why do you read food labels?' the reasons most often given were to look for information on nutrients, calorie content or specific ingredients (Figure 7). In previous surveys, the main reason consumers looked at food labels was to check the best-before/use-by date (FSAI 2003; safefood 2007). More than six in ten people are now concerned about healthy eating (safefood 2007), which may explain why looking for nutrient information and calorie content are now top of the list of reasons for consulting food labels.

**Figure 7: Reason for consulting food labels**  
(all who find food labels informative/fairly informative; n=759)



The qualitative study identified that the main benefit associated with reading food labels is to know exactly what is in the food product, in terms of ingredients, nutritional content and being able to trace the origin of the product. It also found that there is a perception that food labels help to manage weight or medical conditions (such as diabetes and high cholesterol levels), that they help the consumer avoid foods/ingredients to which they are allergic or intolerant, and that they enable consumers to adhere to dietary preferences (e.g. vegetarian).

"It makes me decide what I buy and don't buy, so I can choose the best product. I am informed."  
(Male, 35-54)

"It helps me make a wise choice, but it does take time" (Female, 55+ years)

### **How important is the mandatory labelling information?**

Consumers were asked to rate, in terms of importance, the ten pieces of mandatory labelling information for pre-packaged foods required under the general labelling legislation. Rating was scored on a scale of one to ten, where one means 'not at all important' and ten means 'very important' (Figure 8).

The date of minimum durability (i.e. best-before or use-by date) was rated the most important piece of mandatory labelling information, with 81% (831/1,021) of all consumers scoring it as very important (scores 9 & 10). For those who always/usually read food labels, 84% (376/450) scored the date of minimum durability as very important while 75% (208/277) of consumers who never/rarely read food labels scored this information very important.

However, 23% (232/1,021) of all consumers thought the requirement to label the alcoholic strength of beverages greater than 1.2% alcohol by volume, was not at all important (scores 1 & 2). In particular, 32% (88/277) of those who never/rarely read food labels considered this information unimportant compared to 20% (88/450) of those who always/usually read food labels.

**Figure 8: Consumers' rating of the importance of mandatory labelling information for pre-packaged foodstuffs**  
(n=1,021)

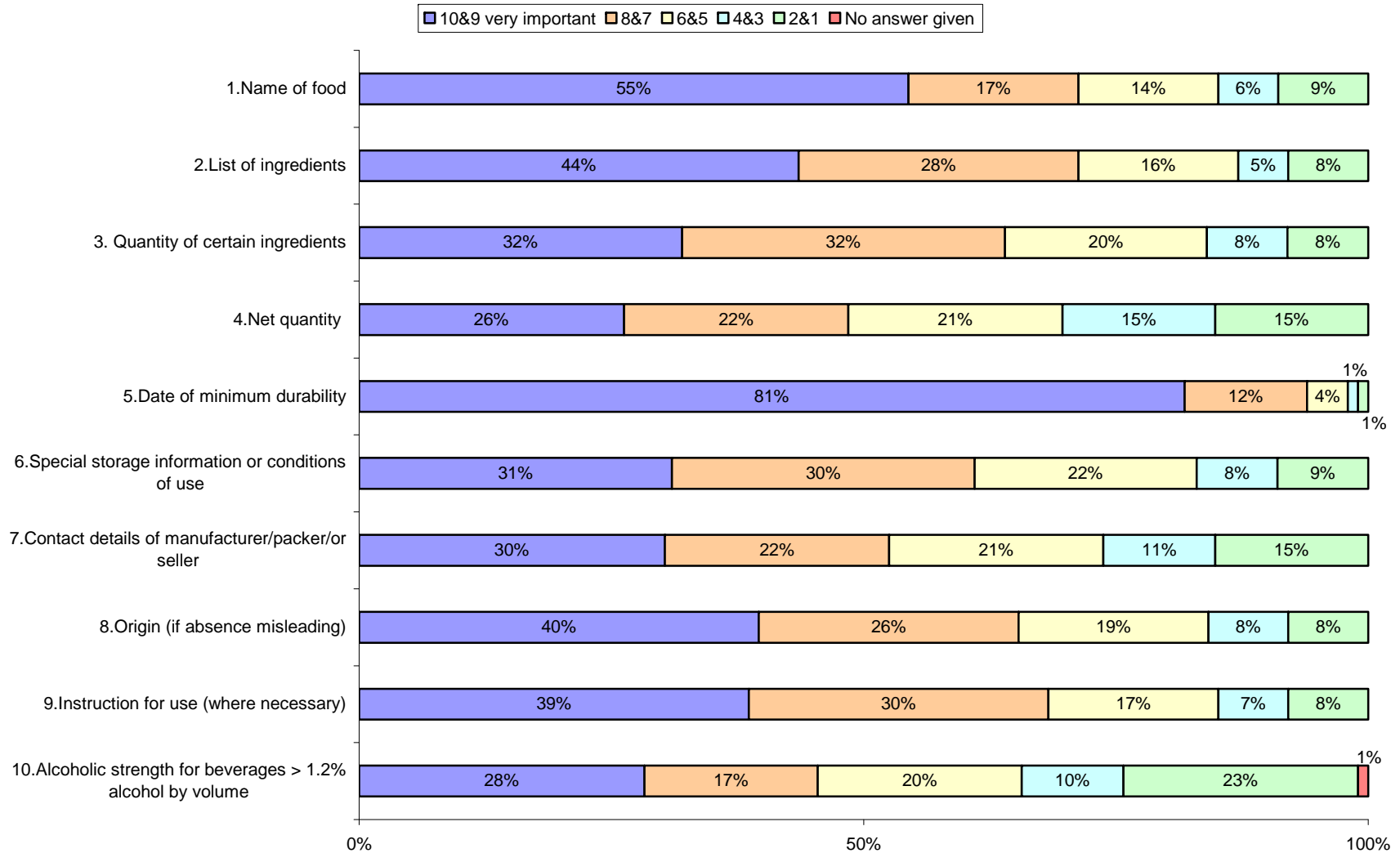


Table 1 shows the rating consumers placed on each piece of mandatory labelling information; scores 6 to 10 are judged 'important' and scores 1 to 5 are judged 'not important'.

According to this categorisation, the most important piece of mandatory information on a label is the date of minimum durability (i.e. best-before date, or use-by date); with 20 people judging this information important, for every one who judged it unimportant. In terms of importance, the date of minimum durability was followed by the list of ingredients, and the name of the food. The least important pieces of mandatory labelling information, according to consumers, were the net quantity and the alcoholic strength.

**Table 1: Consumers' rating of the importance of mandatory labelling in providing information on a food product (n=1,021)**

Rank	Mandatory information	% Who rated information 'important' (Score 6-10)	% Who rated information 'not important' (Score 1-5)	Ratio important: not important
1	Date of minimum durability	95	5	20.3 : 1
2	List of ingredients	78	22	3.5 : 1
3	Name of food	77	23	3.4 : 1
4	Instructions for use	74	26	2.9 : 1
5	Place of origin	74	26	2.8 : 1
6	Quantity of certain ingredients	72	28	2.6 : 1
7	Special storage information/conditions of use	71	29	2.4 : 1
8	Contact details for manufacturer/packer/seller	61	39	1.6 : 1
9	Net quantity	56	44	1.3 : 1
10	Alcoholic strength for beverages >1.2% alcohol by volume	53	47	1.1 : 1

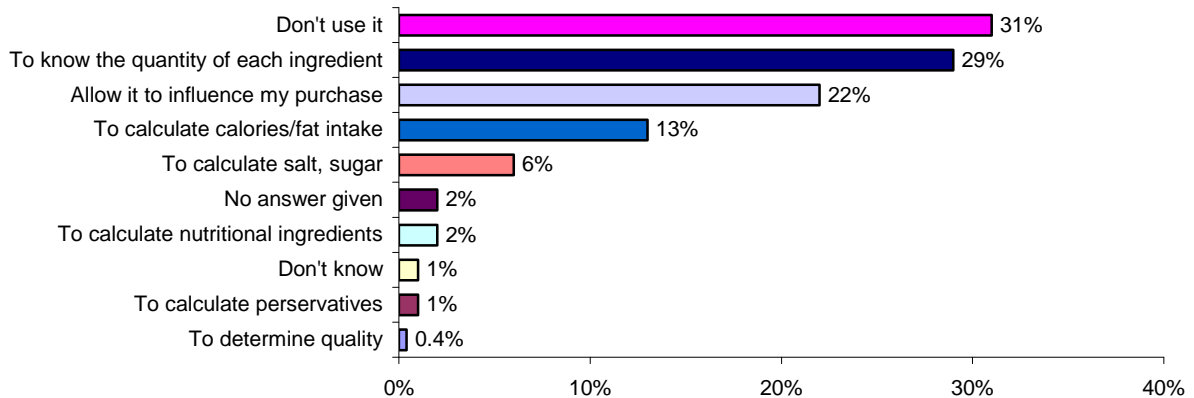
### **Do consumers use the information from Quantitative Ingredient Declaration?**

In some circumstances, the quantity of an ingredient used in the manufacture or preparation of a foodstuff must be stated on the label. For example, when the ingredient is included in the name of the product, such as 'strawberry yoghurt', the percentage of strawberries must be included in the ingredients list. This is known as 'Quantitative Ingredient Declaration' or 'QUID', and is designed to help consumers compare the composition of similar products, where certain ingredients are likely to influence their choice of purchase.

In this survey, however, less than 50% (483/1,021) of respondents had seen percentages of ingredients written in the ingredients list of food products. Furthermore, when these respondents were asked 'How do you use this information?' 31% (150/483) said that they didn't actually use this QUID

information (Figure 9). Some consumers did say they used QUID to determine the quantity of ingredients (29%; 142/483) and to influence their purchase (22%; 107/483). Other responses, however, indicated that consumers use QUID for different reasons, i.e. 'to calculate calories/fat intake', 'to calculate salt, sugar', 'to calculate nutritional ingredients' and 'to calculate preservatives'. However, these values can't actually be calculated using the information provided by QUID.

**Figure 9: Response when asked how the QUID information is used** (all who said they had seen percentages of ingredients written in ingredients list; n=483)



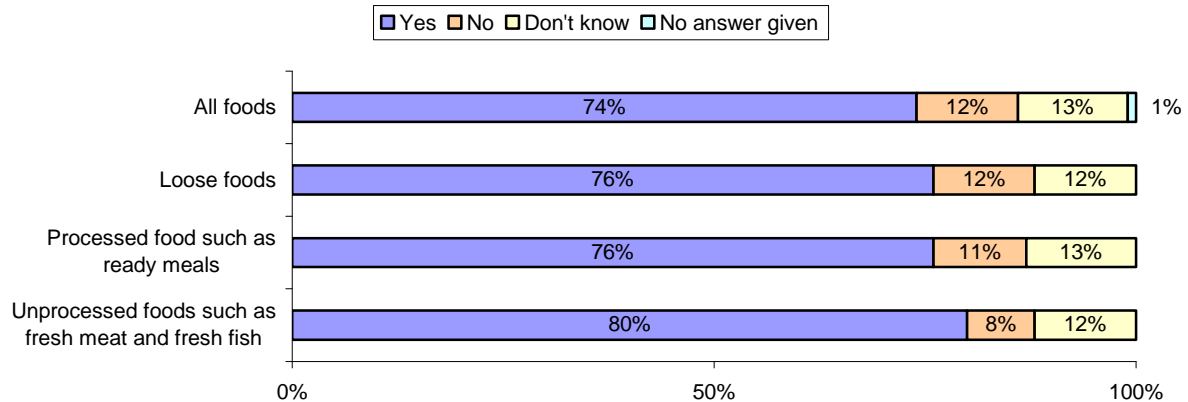
### Do consumers want the origin labelled?

Although for some foods<sup>5</sup> there are specific rules on origin marking laid down in product-specific legislation, the general labelling legislation does not require the place of origin or provenance of the food to be labelled, unless its absence might mislead consumers as to its true origin. A name given to a food, or a reference to a place could imply that the food comes from, or has been made in, that particular area. For example a jar of 'Texas barbeque sauce' that was made in Ireland would need to have that information stated on the label, as would 'Brie' cheese that was made in County Waterford.

In this survey, nearly three quarters of consumers (74%; 755/1,021) thought that it should be compulsory for an indication of origin to be given for all foods – both pre-packaged and loose (Figure 10). Origin labelling has previously been reported as important to consumers in other countries; with two thirds of UK and of French consumers in 2007 saying they felt country of origin labelling was important for making purchasing decisions (FSA 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Examples include: wine, honey, beef, poultry meat imported from outside the EU

**Figure 10: Percentage of consumers who thought it should be compulsory for an indication of origin to be given on ... (n=1,021)**



## Allergen information

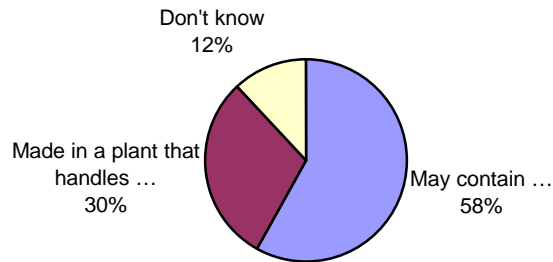
Some people are allergic or intolerant to certain foods or ingredients. Currently there are 14 categories of ingredients (and products thereof) that are required to be labelled, so that consumers with allergies or intolerances can identify foods that contain the ingredients to which they are sensitive:

1. Cereals containing gluten (i.e. wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, kamut or their hybridised strains)
2. Crustaceans, e.g. crab, lobster, crayfish, shrimp, prawn
3. Eggs
4. Fish
5. Soybeans
6. Milk (including lactose)
7. Celery and celeriac
8. Mustard
9. Sesame seeds
10. Sulphur dioxide and sulphites at concentrations of more than 10 mg/kg or 10 mg/litre, expressed as SO<sub>2</sub>
11. Peanuts
12. Tree nuts (almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecans, Brazil nuts, pistachios, and macadamia/Queensland nuts)
13. Lupin
14. Molluscs

Food manufacturers sometimes place allergen warnings on products that do not contain allergenic ingredients, but which are processed in food plants that handle allergens (e.g. nuts). However, the use of such labels is not a legal requirement, and is not recommended practice over controls that could prevent cross-contamination during production and processing. While these labels may offer some legal protection to the manufacturer, they reduce the choice of foods available to those who suffer from food allergies or intolerances.

When consumers were shown two examples of allergen warning labels, most (58%; 592/1,021) considered the text 'may contain (allergen)' more informative than 'made in a plant that handles (allergen)' (Figure 11).

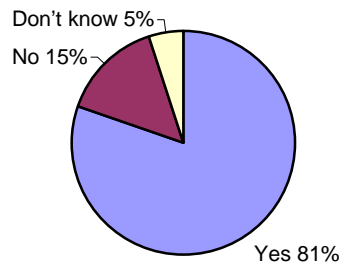
**Figure 11: Percentage of consumers who considered allergen warning message to be informative (n=1,021)**



### **Should health advice be labelled on alcoholic products?**

The vast majority of consumers (81%; 822/1,021) believed that health advice regarding the consumption of alcohol should be labelled on alcoholic products (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Should health advice be labelled on alcoholic products? (Base 1,021)**



As there is no known safe level of alcohol use in pregnancy, the Department of Health and Children advises pregnant women not to drink alcohol in order to protect the developing baby. Consumers were shown two alcohol warning images, and nearly two thirds (63%; 646/1,021) believed that Image 1 best conveyed the message not to consume alcohol during pregnancy (Figure 13).

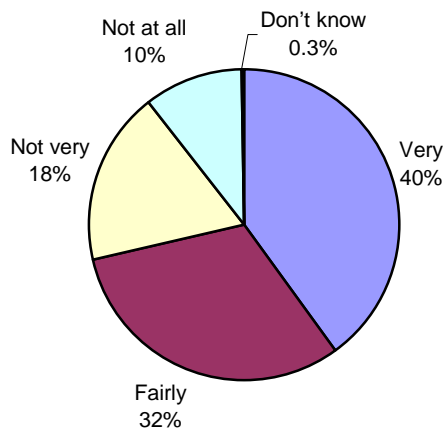
**Figure 13: Percentage of consumers who believed image best conveyed the message not to consume alcohol during pregnancy (n=1,021)**



**Are consumers concerned about salt?**

Over 70% (730/1,021) of consumers were very or fairly concerned about the amount of salt in food (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: How concerned consumers are about salt in food (n=1,021)**



However, at least a third of some demographic groups said they were not very or not at all concerned about salt. These included: 42% (82/194) of people who bought less than half to none of the household shopping, 37% (133/358) of single people, 36% (151/418) of those aged 16-34 years, 35% (174/495) of males and a third (172/522) of those in the lower middle/lower socioeconomic status category (C2DE).



## Nutrition labelling

Nutrition labelling on a food is only compulsory if a nutrition claim, such as ‘low salt’ or ‘high in vitamin C’, is made on the label. When nutrition information is placed on a label, it must adhere to the rules set out in the nutrition labelling legislation<sup>6</sup>. Under this legislation, salt must be declared as ‘sodium’ (Na)<sup>7</sup>; however, 73% (747/1,021) of consumers said they would prefer to see a salt (NaCl) value labelled instead. Based on the qualitative interviews, consumers deemed the format ‘sodium (salt equivalent)’ acceptable. A survey of Australian consumers found that 65% were unable to correctly identify the relationship between salt and sodium and less than half (42%) were able to accurately use labelled sodium information to choose low salt options (Grimes *et al* 2009).

Nutrition information must be presented in one of two formats – Group 1 or Group 2 – depending on the nutrient that is the subject of the claim (Figure 15). The Group 1 format must declare the energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat content; whilst additional information is required in the Group 2 format, namely: sugars, saturates, fibre and sodium. In addition to the information shown in both table formats, the legislation permits additional information for starch, polyols, monounsaturates, polyunsaturates, cholesterol, vitamins and minerals to be labelled.

**Figure 15: Examples of the two formats for nutrition tables laid down in the nutrition labelling legislation**

<b>Group 1</b>		<b>Group 2</b>	
Nutrition Information	Per 100 g	Nutrition Information	Per 100 g
Energy	170 kJ / 40 kcal	Energy	1150 kJ/ 270 kcal
Protein	4.0g	Protein	13 g
Carbohydrate	5.3 g	Carbohydrate	46 g
		Of which sugars	(18 g)
Fat	1.2 g	Fat	3.5 g
		Of which saturates	(0.6 g)
		Fibre	29 g
		Sodium	0.9 g

Eighty seven percent (892/1,021) of consumers considered the nutrition table on a food label to be very (57%; 582/1,021) or fairly (30%; 310/1,021) important; with 68% (690/1,021) preferring the more detailed Group 2 format. Only 5% (21/450) of consumers, who always/usually read food labels, thought nutrition labelling was not important, compared to 24% (66/277) of consumers who rarely/never read food labels.

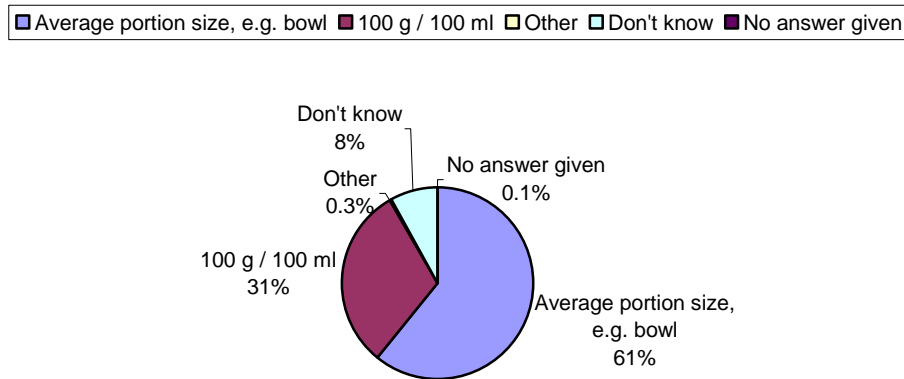
The legislation requires that nutrient values are stated per 100 g or 100 ml, although additional portion size labelling can be used on a voluntary basis.

<sup>6</sup> European Communities (Nutrition Labelling For Foodstuffs) Regulations, 2005 (S.I. No. 65 of 2005)

<sup>7</sup> A salt value can be worked out by multiplying the ‘sodium’ value by 2.5

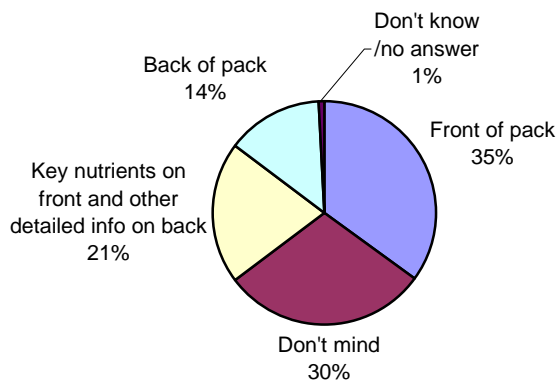
When consumers were asked if they would prefer to see nutrition information labelled per portion size (e.g. per bowl), per 100 g/ml or in some other format, the majority (61%; 621/1,021) said they preferred nutrient values stated per portion size (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Preferred units for nutrition information (n=1,021)**



The quantitative study revealed that the location of the nutrition information on a food product does not seem to be important to consumers. Even though 35% (356/1,021) of respondents thought that nutrition labelling should be placed on the front of a pack for ease of reading, only slightly fewer (30%; 304/1,021) showed no preference as to where the information was located (Figure 17).

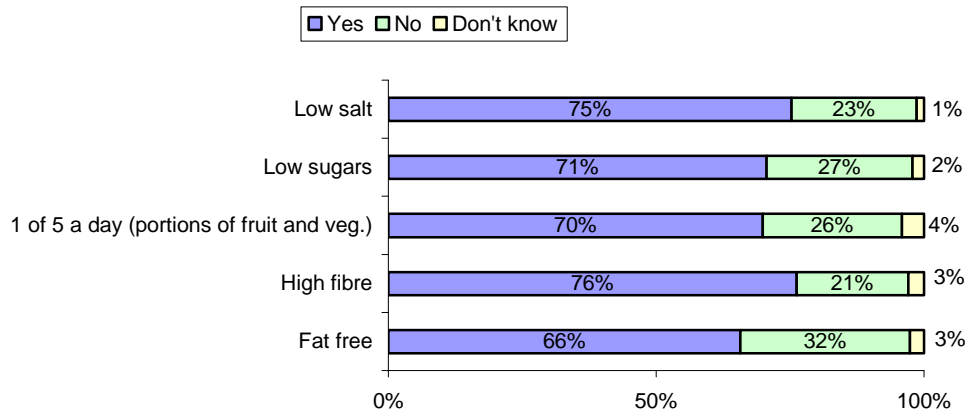
**Figure 17: For ease of reading, respondents believe nutrition information should be declared...(n=1,021)**



## Do nutrition claims influence purchase?

Nutrition claims do seem to influence consumers' purchasing decisions, with at least two thirds of respondents saying that they would be inclined to buy food products labelled with a nutrition claim (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Would you be inclined to buy a food product with the following claims? (n=1,021)**



A recent audit of foods in the EU (Flabel 2008) found that nutrition claims were placed on the front of pack of nearly 40% of foods surveyed, i.e. sweet biscuits, breakfast cereals, ready meals, carbonated soft drinks and yoghurts; so it is important that consumers understand what these claims mean.

"When I shop for biscuits, I go for 'low sugar' or 'low fat', that's my excuse to buy sweet things, then I know that I'm buying the best of the worst." (Female, 55+ years)

The qualitative survey, however, revealed that some shoppers can be suspicious of nutrition claims and perceive them to be 'marketing' messages.

"Labels are lying, it doesn't matter what they say. Like for juices: "Not from concentrate", "100%"... I drink juice from a pack because I like it, not because I trust what's on the pack. If I wanted healthy juice, I'd press it myself." (Female, 15-34 years)

## Signpost labelling

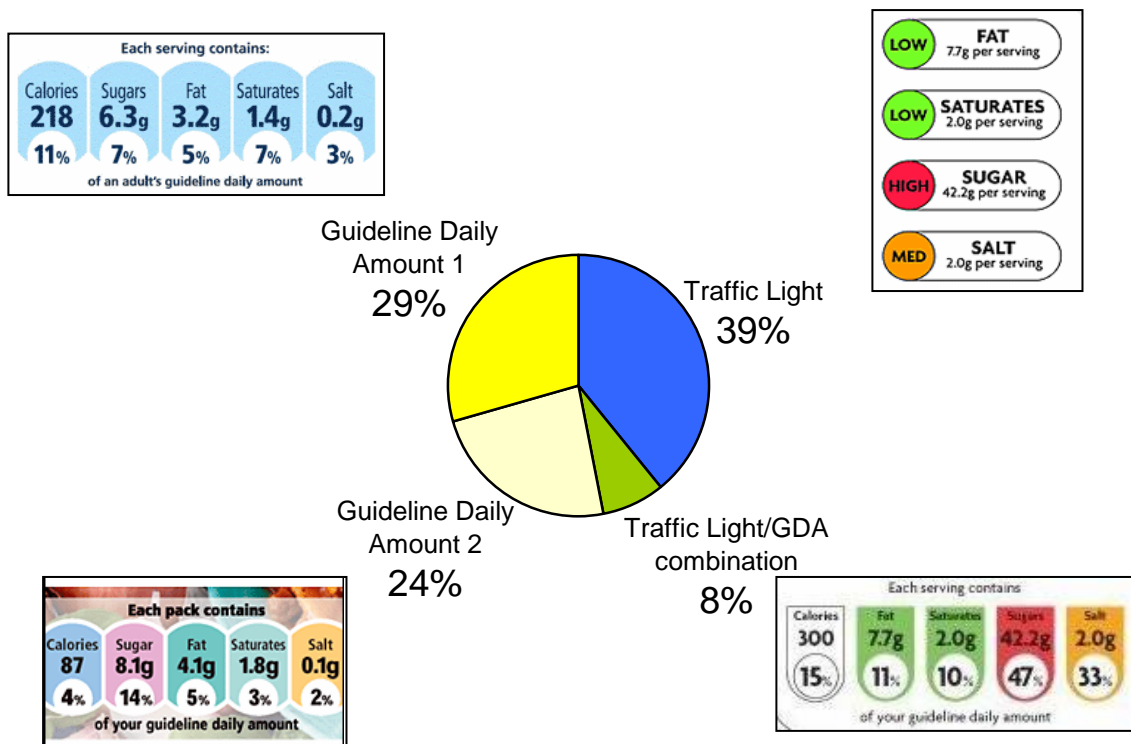
Traffic light labelling and guideline daily amount (GDA) schemes are both examples of voluntary 'signpost' labelling, which convey nutrition information about the product and are usually placed on the front of the pack.

The traffic light scheme, developed by the Food Standards Agency UK, depicts whether a food is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in key nutritional requirements, e.g., fat, saturates, sugar, salt, calories. The GDA labelling system was developed by the food industry, and shows the amount of key nutritional

requirements per portion of the food, and what percentage a portion of the food contributes to a person’s daily guideline amount<sup>8</sup>.

Consumers were shown four examples of signpost labelling: two GDA formats, a traffic light format and a traffic light/GDA combination. Thirty nine percent (399/1,021) of consumers said they found the traffic light system most informative, while 29% (301/1,021) and 24% (242/1,021) of consumers opted for the GDA 1 and 2 schemes, respectively. Only 8% (79/1,021) of consumers said they found the traffic light/GDA combination most informative (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Consumers’ perception of most informative voluntary nutrition labelling scheme (n=1,021)**



The qualitative research found that the GDA system it is not fully understood by most people, but considered informative when explained. Many people misinterpret the ‘% GDA’ as being the percentage of the nutrient in the pack, instead of the percentage of the guideline daily amount. There was also confusion as to whether the percentage figure related to the entire pack, or to a single serving.

“The traffic light is a good idea, but whose opinion is it that it should be green or orange? [...] Who says it is good or bad for you?” (Male, 35-54 years)

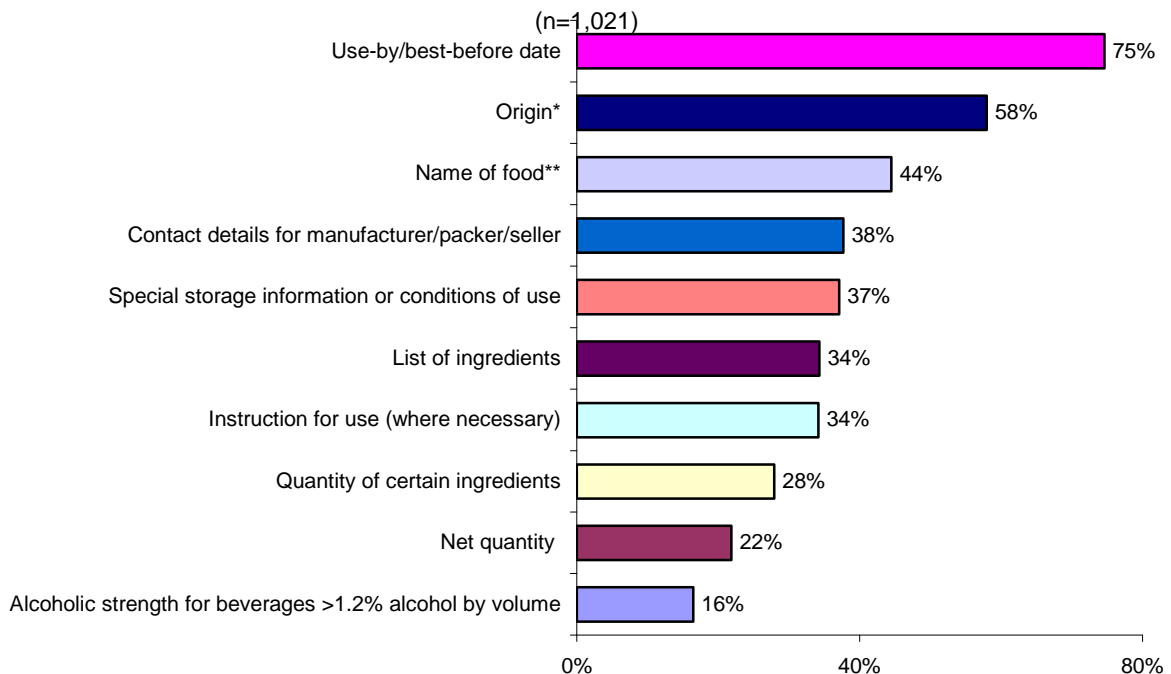
<sup>8</sup> Guideline daily amounts are a guide to how much energy and key nutrients the average healthy person needs in order to have a balanced diet. GDAs on labels are a guide, not a target. They are based on the ‘average’ adult woman, but active men will have higher requirements and children will have lower requirements

A study carried out on behalf of the Food Standards Agency UK, found that consumers are likely to use these signpost, or front of pack labels, when buying a product for the first time; when comparing between different products; when shopping for children; when trying to control intake of certain nutrients (e.g. salt); or when trying to loose weight. However, people who are not interested in healthy eating avoid reading them because they perceive the labelling as an unwelcome attempt to control their behaviour (Malam *et al* 2009).

### Labelling on loose foods

With the exception of some foods<sup>9</sup> labelling (other than the name of the food) is not required on foods sold loose. When consumers were asked which of the mandatory labelling requirements for pre-packaged foods would they like to see on loose foods, 75% (762/1,021) said the date of minimum durability, and 58% (592/1,021) said the origin (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Percentage of consumers who believe the following labelling information, mandatory for pre-packaged foods, should be indicated on foods sold loose**



\*Under product-specific legislation, an indication of origin is currently required for some foods sold loose (e.g. beef)

\*\*Under the general labelling legislation, the name of the food is currently required for foods sold loose and should be placed on a notice prominent position

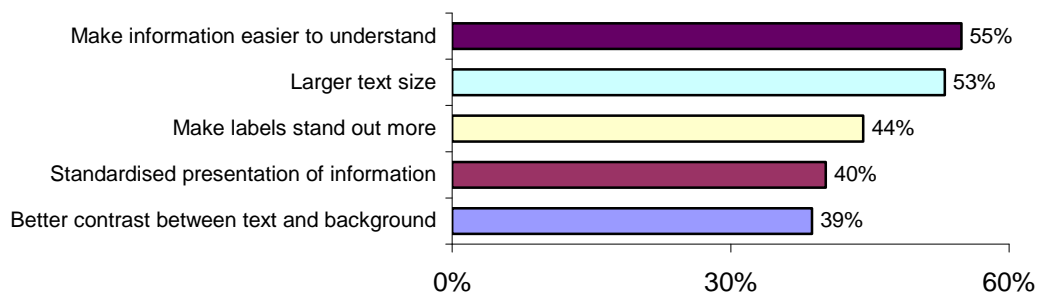
<sup>9</sup> Some product-specific legislation requires an indication of the origin on foods sold loose, e.g. beef and fish

## How could food labelling be improved?

In 2003, 50% of consumers felt that labels had the correct amount of information and 51% believed the information on labels to be clear (FSAI 2003). In the current survey, the qualitative research revealed that some elements of labels are confusing, such as the use of non-standardised measurements for nutritional information, the use of scientific terms for ingredients or nutrients, the % GDA, inconsistent colours in GDA tables, etc. Some consumers said they were confused when information was only labelled on the outside packaging of multi-packs, and not on the individual items.

When presented with a list of five suggestions for improving food labels, over half of consumers in the quantitative study believed the information on labels should be made easier to understand (i.e. using ordinary language), and that text size should be increased (Figure 21). These findings were supported by the qualitative study.

**Figure 21: Percentage of consumers who agree that the suggestions for improving food labels would make it easier to choose food products (n=1,021)**



Although food labels need to improve on clarity, 53% (546/1,021) of consumers said they would be discouraged from buying a product with a label that contained less information compared to other products; 39% (398/1,021) said they would not be discouraged and 8% (77/1,021) didn't know if it would discourage them or not. The FSAI survey in 2003, found that although, in theory, consumers favour including the maximum amount of information on a label, in practice consumers surveyed said they find this information difficult to understand (FSAI 2003).

The qualitative research found that food labels with the most impact contain a standardised GDA table, large text, with key information on the front of the pack (e.g. GDA, date of minimum durability, origin, and allergen information), have eye catching and appealing visuals, and use colour.

## Conclusions

The objective of this study was to establish if consumers in Ireland understand the various forms of labelling currently presented on foodstuffs, and if labels help consumers make informed purchasing choices.

Although the aim of food labelling is to inform consumers of the characteristics of a food product, so that they can make a more informed purchasing decision, this study found that over one half of consumers never, rarely or only sometimes read food labels. The proportion of consumers who always consult food labels, however, has risen to 25% from 8% in 2004.

The main reasons consumers do consult food labels, are to obtain information on the nutritional content, or to look for specific ingredients. Consumers are least likely to consult labels on everyday products such as milk, pasta, juices, fruit and vegetables, and also for foods they considered to be 'junk food'.

The information on current labelling is likely to be sufficient, with nearly three quarters of consumers saying that they found food labels to be informative. However, consumers who always/usually read food labels were more likely to find food labels informative, than those who rarely/never read food labels.

Of the mandatory labelling information, required under the general labelling legislation, consumers ranked the date of minimum durability as the most important piece of information. Although consumers ranked the declaration of alcohol in alcoholic products as the least important piece of mandatory information, over 80% said that health advice should be labelled on alcoholic products. Currently, this is not mandatory.

The survey found that many consumers are unaware of QUID information, which is often labelled on food products. QUID also seems to confuse consumers as some say they use it for inappropriate reasons – to calculate the nutritional content of a food product, for example.

Eighty seven percent considered the nutrition table important; with 68% preferring the more detailed Group 2 format. Again, consumers who usually/always read food labels were more likely to consider nutrition information as important, than consumers who never/rarely read food labels.

The location of nutritional information on the pack did not appear to be important to the consumers surveyed in this study. Although around one third said they would prefer the nutrition information to be on the front of pack, only a slightly lower proportion said they didn't mind where it was located.

Consumers would prefer to see nutrient values stated per portion size, rather than per 100 g/ml. They also indicated that they would prefer to see the salt

content declared as 'salt' rather than 'sodium', but that a 'sodium (salt equivalent)' format would be acceptable. As nearly three quarters of consumers said that they were concerned about salt in food, it is important that the labelling provides this information in a format they understand.

Labelling does seem to influence consumers' purchasing decisions, with at least two thirds saying they would be inclined to buy a food bearing a nutritional claim. This survey also showed that origin labelling is important to consumers, as the majority of consumers said they wanted origin labelling on all foods, including loose and pre-packaged foods. Although (with the exception of the name of the food and, in some cases, an indication of origin) the labelling required under the general labelling legislation does not apply to foods sold loose; in this survey, however, 75% and 58% of consumers said they would like to see an indication of the date of minimum durability and the origin, respectively, on foods sold loose.

With regards to voluntary labelling, when consumers were shown examples of signpost nutrition labelling schemes, the traffic light format was judged most informative, but a combination of the GDA/traffic light system was judged least informative. The qualitative study showed that although the GDA scheme was not fully understood by consumers, it was considered informative once explained. Almost twice as many consumers considered the voluntary allergen message 'May contain (allergen)' more informative than the 'Made in a plant that handles (allergen)' message.

This study has shown that some aspects of food labelling are confusing for consumers. This indicates a need to educate consumers on the different aspects of food labelling to enable them to make more informed purchasing decisions.



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