FDA FOOD LABEL
REQUIREMENTS
IN A NUTSHELL

FOODPACKAGING LABELS.NET

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There are at least two reasons you, as a food manufacturer, want to comply with regulations that the Food and Drug Administration prescribes for all labels for food made, imported and distributed in the US. These reasons are:

You certainly want potential customers to be informed as accurately as possible about your product.

Unless you comply with FDA regulations concerning required information on food packaging labels, your company may be subject to sanctions and penalties, while your food product may be removed from the market.

It is the sole responsibility of food producers to follow FDA guidelines carefully and give accurate specifications for food label design to their label manufacturers. Since the process of labeling food is very complex, here we will give you an outline of what it entails, with additional resources where you can further inform yourself about food labeling.

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5 BASIC ELEMENTS OF A FOOD PACKAGING LABEL

When you look at pages and pages of information on the fda.gov website about how to properly label your food product, it is at first difficult to decipher what type of this required information is absolutely mandatory. On closer inspection you'll find that the following five items must appear on every food packaging sticker:

- Statement of identity

- Manufacturer, packer or distributor's name and address

- Net quantity of food packaging

- Nutrition facts

- Ingredients list

Note that the statement of identity means common name for that food product, NOT the brand's name. Examples are: tomato soup, turkey smoked sausage, granola bars, chocolate chip cookies, etc.

The manufacturer, packer or distributor's address should contain the street address in case it is not listed, city or town, US state or country and ZIP or mailing code.

PLACEMENT OF FOOD LABEL ELEMENTS

Principal Display Panel or PDP is the front part of the food packaging or the "facing side" that is the most visible to consumers. This is where the statement of identity and net quantity are required to appear. The net weight information must appear in the lower 30% part of the PDP. Nutrition facts, ingredients list and manufacturer's information can either be placed on the PDP, if there is enough space, or on the Information Panel – the panel right next to and to the right of the PDP.

Aside from this mandatory information, product providers are free to use the remaining space on the label to provide additional information that may be of interest to their customers.

Of course, there are many cases where it is impossible to place information as instructed here, due to small size of the package. In those situations the FDA allows information to be featured on any label panel that is visible to the customer. Packages with insufficient vertical space can have label information laid out horizontally.

Here is FDA's detailed guide to what goes where on a food label.

TYPE REQUIREMENTS

The statement of identity should be in bold type, prominent and at least half the size of the largest type on the food label.

The Food and Drug Administration urges food manufacturers to use 6 point or larger Helvetica Black and Helvetica Regular types for information panel labeling, but that is not mandatory. Any type is allowed as long as it is legible and conspicuous, the contrast between the lettering is clear and the letters are not more than three times as high as they are wide. Also, the heading "Nutrition Facts" needs to be larger than all other information on that panel and set full width.

All nutrition information must be one color type, usually black, and its background should be white or neutral. The contrast between type and background colors should be sharp. In some cases the reverse is possible, but permission should be granted by the FDA.

Any font type is allowed on nutrition facts label as long as it is legible, conspicuous and in one color (usually black) that makes good contrast with the background color (usually white or neutral).

INGREDIENTS LIST

All ingredients in a food packaging, including water, spices and flavors, must be listed on the label in the order of predominance by weight (from the ingredient that weighs the most to the ingredient that weighs the least). This information can be placed on the PDP or on the Information Panel, in type size that is at least 1/16 inches in height.

Always use common names of ingredients, unless there is a regulation that dictates different terms for specific ingredients.

For all food products regulated by the FDA and packaged in or after January 2006, labels must inform about the common food allergens. These are: **Milk, Eggs, Tree Nuts, Peanuts, Wheat, Fish, Crustacean shellfish, Soybeans**.

It is also mandatory to specify the type of tree nut, fish and Crustacean shellfish present in the food. The allergens can either be listed on the ingredients list, or after the list with the word "Contains" before the listed allergens.

Food manufacturers can apply for an exemption from these allergen labeling requirements. For more information about specific allergen labeling requirements, see this page. Also see the complete ingredients list requirements information.

Milk

Eggs

Fish

Peanuts

Soybeans

Crustacean Shellfish

Wheat

Tree Nuts

All ingredients in a food packaging, including water, spices and flavors, must be listed on the label in the order of predominance by weight.

NUTRITION FACTS

(source: www.fda.gov)

Nutrition facts information consists of three parts:

Serving size

Nutrients

Vitamins and minerals

Nutrition information must be separated using hairlines, as shown on the previous page. The width of the three bars separating categories of information in the nutrition facts label is optional.

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