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Front-of-Package Labeling in Thailand

Expanding waistlines and increasing health awareness have given rise to a consumer culture infatuated with well-being, not only in Thailand but all over the world. For producers, this means intense pressure to create healthy or healthier versions of their products. For the government—specifically the Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—this means an obligation to implement and enforce stricter regulations on food and nutrition.

The Thai Perspective

As we move into an age where life is increasingly fast-paced and efficient, there is no reason why the food industry should be left behind. While nutritional labels are often displayed on the back of packaging, Front-of-Package (FOP) labeling has become popular among policy makers because it simplifies the most important information and places it where it is visible at first sight to the hurried consumer. In Thailand, the original 1998 Notification of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) implemented non-FOP nutritional labeling requirements which were mandatory for certain foods and voluntary for others. A survey that was conducted in 2009, however, concluded that the nutritional information was difficult to understand, which in turn caused the FDA to make a number of changes.

In a series of subsequent ministerial notifications, the FDA implemented the Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) system of labeling, which is an FOP system that made GDA labels mandatory for snack products and certain ready-to-eat foods. The current GDA label breaks down nutritional information into the following four categories: calories, sugars, fats, and sodium. This requires producers to clearly state the nutrient content and percentage of recommended daily intake of each package.

FOP Labeling Around the World

Countries around the world have also introduced policies which mirror the objectives of the GDA system of labeling to help consumers make the “smart” choice in a shorter period of time. For example, the European Union takes the same approach as Thailand, basing its guidelines on the latest published scientific data on dietary requirements and recommendations. Similarly, the United States uses a voluntary Facts Up Front labeling system, which calls for a summary of calories, saturated fat, sodium, and sugar per serving on the front of various food and beverage products.

Nutritional value per
Consumption should be split into times

Energy	Sugar	Fat	Sodium
..Kcal..	..Gram..	..Gram..	..Milligram..
... %	... %	... %	... %

* Percentage of maximum consumption volume allowed per day

Thailand's GDA Label

Singapore, on the other hand, uses the Healthier Choice Symbol, an interpretive nutrition logo which distinguishes products that are lower in saturated fat and trans fat, sodium, and sugar, but higher in whole grains, fiber, and other healthy nutrients. Nutrition guidelines are set according to each product category. There are 12 main product categories and more than 70 subcategories. In addition, there are variants including the Healthier Snack Symbol and the Healthier Ingredient Symbol.



Eat All Foods In Moderation

Singapore's Healthier Choice Symbol

Australia and New Zealand use the Daily Intake Guide and the Health Star Rating. The Daily Intake Guide is a voluntary scheme which uses a set of reference values for acceptable levels of intake for energy and a variety of nutrients, sugars, protein, fat, fiber, and sodium, to name a few. The Health Star Rating system was developed to make it easier for consumers to compare similarly packaged food and therefore make healthier decisions. It ranks products on a scale from half a star to five stars based on their nutritional profile which includes, for example, energy, saturated fat, and sodium. This system of labeling is a hybrid of the GDA system used by Thailand, the European Union, and the United States, as well as the Healthier Choice Symbol used by Singapore.

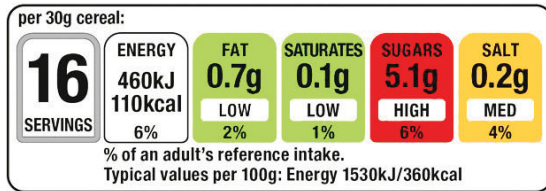


Australia's and New Zealand's Daily Intake Guide and Health Star Rating

FOP Labeling in Thailand (from page 7)

The Future of FOP Labeling

The food and beverage community has pushed to revamp the current FOP labeling scheme in Thailand. Currently, the National Food Committee, a subcommittee of the Thai FDA, is working to add to the present FOP GDA labeling scheme, but the additions have yet to be announced. It is known, however, that use of the new FOP label will be voluntary and



Traffic Light Nutritional Labeling

presently it is only being considered for certain foods. Some organizations are looking for inspiration in the “traffic light” nutritional labeling system, a system that uses the colors red, amber, and green to indicate high, acceptable, and low levels of fat, saturated fats, sugar, and salt in various products. Foods with “green” indicators are healthier than foods with “red” indicators, while foods with “amber” indicators fall in between.

The Federation of Thai Industries Food Group has supported the use of GDA nutrition labels and is determined to become involved in educating consumers about the GDA system of labeling. It prefers the GDA system of labeling to a color-coded system or an interpretive nutritional logo because these are sometimes misleading and vague and often do not comprehensively take into account different nutritional needs.

The good news is that the industry has been invited to participate in the development of a new scheme which producers can both contribute to and benefit from. With the correct industry input, FOP labeling should offer consumers informative nutritional information that is apt for a fast-paced world. 🏆