

Webinar Summary

📅 24 October

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Can a nutrition label change our eating habits?

A summary of Paulig's and EIT Food's webinar about the European Commissions' proposal of a harmonized front-of-pack nutrition label to help consumers make healthier choices.

Event description

As part of the European Commission's strategy for a sustainable food system, a legislative proposal of a harmonized, mandatory, front-of-pack nutrition label (FOPNL) is underway, with the aim to help consumers make healthier food choices and address the public health burden of diseases of lifestyle. This event invited decision-maker, researcher, consumer, and industry representatives, to share their knowledge, experience, and expectations around FOPNL and the way forward. The discussion included important considerations such as features of importance, implications for consumers, and company learnings and best practices.

The event was organized by [EIT Food](#), Europe's leading food innovation initiative, and [Paulig](#), an international food and beverage company.

Key takeaways

- ✓ Front-of-pack nutrition labeling (FOPNL) policies are one key component in driving consumer decision making.
- ✓ No FOPNL system may be perfect, but there is evidence already gathered, highlighting the impact of simpler, evaluative, color-coded labels in a busy shopping context.
- ✓ Cross-sector collaboration for healthier and more sustainable European diets is essential and FOPNL harmonization is a concrete example.
- ✓ A FOPNL can encourage and guide companies to shape public health through transparency and reformulation.

Speakers & Panelists

Moderator



Susan Cloran, MBA RD(SA)
Senior Vice President
Eat Well Global



Rolf Ladau
Chief Executive Officer
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Marja-Liisa Meurice
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Els de Groene, PhD
Global Head Diet & Health
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Karin Jonsson, PhD
Sustainability Program
Manager, Nutrition & Food
Health
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Emma Calvert
Senior Food Policy Officer
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Herbert Smorenburg, PhD
Managing Director
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Bettina Julin, PhD
Nutritionist
the Swedish Food Agency



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Detailed Summary

As part of the wider European Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, as well as the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, conversations around empowering healthy consumer choices have taken center stage. **As such, particular interest has been placed in a harmonized, mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labeling (FOPNL) system across all European member states**, for which an impact assessment is being prepared by the European Commission.

There are a number of existing FOPNL systems, with varied features and use cases, e.g., expression of serving sizes or per 100g, inclusive or exclusive of positive nutrients and ingredients etc. **The food and beverage industry, as represented through Unilever and Paulig in the event, contributed with diverse perspectives around different features of FOPNL, but shared a common sentiment around the ultimate goal of empowering consumers in the quest for healthier products.** In this light, Unilever representative, Dr. Els de Groene, highlighted that FOPNL should help consumer choice and can act as an incentive for the industry to reformulate products, which ultimately points to product-specific FOPNL criteria, while also noting the need for real-life setting effectiveness studies. Dr. Karin Jonsson, from Paulig, exemplified the opportunity for companies to use a FOPNL (in Paulig's case, [Nutri-Score](#)) as part of a comprehensive internal nutrition framework, including in goal setting, product development, and communications, and encouraged stakeholder contribution to a balanced discussion.

The panel discussion kicked off with a broad question about the opportunities and challenges of a harmonized FOPNL system. **The opportunities mentioned included reduced confusion from conflicting label information, easier and healthier purchase decision-making, and optimized company operations** e.g., in labeling. Regarding challenges, the panel highlighted the complexity of developing and implementing FOPNL on a broader scale, accounting for the variety of existing, localized systems, as well as the potential loss in consumer confidence due to unfamiliarity with the new label. The need for balanced conversations and a thoughtful transition plan were understood to address these challenges, and beyond (e.g., food loss, company costs).

Another noteworthy consideration when it comes to the upcoming legislative proposal on harmonized FOPNL is the benefit of its mandatory, as opposed to voluntary, nature. The panelists noted that voluntary measures may be worthwhile for positive (or endorsement) labels, while they usually fall short when it comes to products of lower nutritional quality, such as confectionery, as the food industry often omits voluntary information on poorer nutrition scoring from product labels. **With the aim to facilitate consumer choice, and increase trust, through ubiquitous, consistent, and simple messaging across products and product categories, it was concluded that the case for a mandatory label is compelling, which would also create a more leveled "playing field" from a company perspective.**

When considering the specific features a mandatory label should include, and the case for a mandatory or voluntary harmonization as such, the panelists all emphasized to the need for a thorough evaluation of independent, peer-reviewed scientific evidence and the subsequent implementation of an appropriate system. The current evidence points to simple, evaluative, and interpretive (i.e., color-coded) reference labels being better suited in meeting consumers' information needs in a busy shopping context. Moreover, views and scientific interpretations around 100g versus portion size were shared. Other important considerations mentioned by the panelists and speakers included the need for fair judgements of food products, in line with dietary guidelines, and a continuous process of monitoring and improvement of the chosen system. Also, the significance of embedding FOPNL in other nutrition policies and standards, such as marketing practices or school meals.

The discussion concluded with a **positive outlook on the power of the upcoming legislative proposal for public health in Europe, and the opportunity for the food and beverage industry to fruitfully contribute to the dialogue, and ultimately, empower consumer health and wellbeing.**

Additional resources

- [Overview of the Farm to Fork Strategy](#), in which the legislative proposal of the harmonization of FOPNL was announced and the [Commission Report to the European Parliament and the Council](#) regarding the use of additional forms of expression and presentation of the nutrition declaration (front-of-pack nutrition labelling).
- Two scientific literature reviews on FOPNL by the Joint Research Centre, which aims to provide evidence-based scientific support to the European policymaking process: [A comprehensive review](#) and [an update of the evidence](#).
- [Background of the European Food Safety Authority's \(EFSA\) work on nutrient profiling for the development of harmonised FOPNL and the setting of nutrient profiles for restricting nutrition and health claims on foods, with particular interest in EFSA's Scientific Advice.](#)