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Misleading food claims: 9 years and counting for EU to act

It's already 9 years that BEUC and its member organisations began calling for nutrient profiles to be adopted. These tools would help slash the number of health and nutrition claims which give a healthy halo to unhealthy foods.

During a press conference held this morning in Brussels, BEUC and its Belgian member Test Achats/Test Aankoop jointly exposed these claims which mislead consumers.

This month BEUC and 11 of its members¹ launched a campaign to denounce the [numerous food products](#) which bear misleading claims. Consumer organisations urge the EU Commission to swiftly publish the [nutrient profiles](#) which are now 9 years late.

Nutrition claims highlight the benefits some nutrients can bring to a foodstuff, such as "source of calcium" or "70% fat less". Health claims underline the food's effect on the body, such as "Vitamin C boosts your immune system".

Ivo Mechels, CEO of Test Achats/Test Aankoop said *that "there is a list of health and nutrition claims which are allowed or forbidden, but this is clearly not enough."* This list does not prevent food makers from displaying the message "high in fibres and vitamin D" on a box of sugar-loaded cereals. This makes food and drinks look much healthier than they actually are.

BEUC members have spotted numerous products of concern across Europe. Examples include dairy products high in sugar but also high in minerals and vitamins, to strengthen bones and boost the immune system. Others include high-sugar baby cereals boasting about iron and zinc to help brain development, and powder chocolate with 75% sugar that boosts memory and concentration. The list goes on...

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, commented:

"Who would think that breakfast cereals rich in fibres and calcium are actually one third sugar? Our members have found [massive numbers of claims](#) across Europe which mislead consumers as they disguise foods high in sugar or fat as healthy options. This is unacceptable.

"At a time when obesity is rising in Europe, consumers should be able to trust claims on packaging. Only nutrient profiles can ensure this happens, so it is high time the EU took action."

Background:

The solution to prevent unhealthy foods from appearing healthier than they are is to use [nutrient profiles](#). They are concrete tools to decide whether products are healthy enough to deserve a claim.

The EU first proposed to come up with these profiles in 2006. The Commission was supposed to publish them in 2009. But 9 years later, there is still no sign of them. Last summer, members of the European Parliament even voted in a non-binding resolution to scrap those profiles altogether.

BEUC and its member organisations believe these profiles need to be adopted to enable consumers to make an informed healthy choice. Consumer organisations are awaiting the EU Commission report to be published in 2018. Let's hope this 9th anniversary does not make it to 10.

ENDS

1. Arbeiterkammer (Austria), Altroconsumo (Italy), DECO (Portugal), Forbrugerrådet Tænk (Denmark), Forbrukerrådet (Norway), FRC (Switzerland), Kypriakos Sundesmos Katanaloton (Cyprus), OCU (Spain), Test Achats/Test Aankoop (Belgium), vzbv (Germany), ZPS (Slovenia)

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