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Major food makers take first step towards coloured nutrition label

Today [6 major food companies have announced they will develop a colour-coded nutrition label](#) on their products' packages. BEUC welcomes this landmark step but deplores the way manufacturers want to define the colours reflecting the foods' nutritional value.

"We are satisfied that these major food companies are finally recognising that traffic lights do help consumers to make healthier food choices. We are happy that over the years they listened to our constant reminders on what consumers understand better to make an informed choice¹.

"BEUC has long been calling for mandatory, front-of-pack simplified nutrition labelling using colours. Today consumers have busy lives and little time to shop. Such schemes inform them at a glance about the amount of fat, saturates, sugar and salt in the food they buy."

Regarding the fact that companies have chosen to express the traffic lights per portion instead of 100ml/g, Monique Goyens continued:

"However, we hope the companies' move is only a first step towards a simplified label that genuinely makes the healthy choice easy for EU consumers.

"We disapprove of a colour scheme which uses the portion as the reference, as opposed to 100g/ml. Not only will it make it harder for consumers to compare food labels and figure out which product is the healthier option but it will even mislead them.

"In practice, what may seem as a small tweak will lead to more 'greens' and 'ambers' on confectionery, breakfast cereals and biscuits for instance. These are all foods high in fat, sugar or salt that typically have a lot of 'reds' under the current UK traffic lights system – and rightly so.

"We doubt that nutrition labelling is the right tool to educate consumers on portion sizes. It rather aims at telling consumers how healthy or not their food is.

"Portions can never be the reference for colour-coded nutrition information. They can only be an extra piece of information, provided they are realistic. Indeed, who eats only 30g cereals at breakfast? Who counts sweets from a big bag until one reaches the food maker's recommended portion?"

ENDS

1 The EU-wide application of a front-of-pack, colour-coded simplified nutrition labelling scheme was first touted during discussions on the European Commission's proposal for a review of the EU food labelling rules, which was released in January 2008.