

Contact: Jonathan La Morte: +32 (0)2 789 24 01
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Industry can do better European Parliament should veto the « X% LESS » nutrition claim

Next week (30 and 31 January), the European Parliament's Committee in charge of Food Safety will vote to either allow or prohibit the "x% less" nutrition claim. BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation is convinced this claim, if permitted, will be misleading for consumers and calls upon European parliamentarians to veto it.

The claim which the European Parliament is scrutinising would allow food manufacturers to advertise reductions of calories or specific nutrients (fat, sugar, salt) as small as 15%. BEUC believes this would discourage industry from taking bolder steps to increase the healthiness of their food and make it more difficult for consumers to choose a healthy diet.

Monique Goyens, the Director General of BEUC said:

"The fight against obesity calls for healthier products to be made available to consumers. While we fully support industry reformulating their products to reduce the levels of fat, salt and sugar, we believe allowing this claim would be a step in the wrong direction. It would allow industry to promote even minor changes to the recipe and may mislead credulous consumers into believing that the product has become significantly healthier which is not the case.

We push for reformulation to take place but we expect it to be driven first and foremost by public health reasons and not just used as a marketing tool. Consumers do need the food industry to step up efforts on reformulation. They don't need an extra claim."

END

Note: The main reasons why BEUC objects to this new nutrition claim are:

1. A claim on nutrient reductions as low as 15% will not help consumers to make healthy food choices but will rather be used by the industry as a marketing tool.
2. Food manufacturers already use many nutrition claims in their communications. Comparing products to make healthy choices can already be a real challenge. The new "x% less" nutrition claim will only add to consumer confusion.
3. The currently existing "reduced" claims require at least a 30% (or 25% for salt) reduction but the label mentions no figures. When faced with making a choice between products bearing these claims and products claiming "now 15% less", consumers may choose the products bearing the latter as they could interpret the reduction to be bigger than for the "reduced" products.
4. Comparative claims such as "reduced fat" or "light in sugars" compare a product's composition with that of other food in a category. This is to prevent such claims to appear on a product which has a higher salt, fat or sugar content than other similar foods even after reformulation has taken place. With the claim "x% less", which compares a food with its previous recipe, consumers might be tempted to buy a product which they believe is healthier, whereas this is actually not the case!
5. Even after 15% reduction, many foods would still have a high fat, sugars and/or salt content. Small reductions are easy to achieve for manufacturers, and "now X% less claims are likely to pop up all over the market, including on unhealthy foods.

Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs AISBL | Der Europäische Verbraucherverband

Rue d'Arlon 80, B-1040 Brussels • Tel. +32 (0)2 789 24 01 •

press@beuc.eu • www.beuc.eu • www.twitter.com/beuctweet

TVA: BE 0422 071 051 • EC register for interest representatives: identification number 9505781573-45