

Contact: Jonathan La Morte: +32 (0)2 789 24 01
Date: 12/12/2012
Reference: PR 2012/035

Early Christmas present: dodgy health claims on food to disappear from shelves?

December 14 marks the final whistle for unproven health claims used by EU's food industry. That day ends the 6-month transition period for industry to adapt their packaging and stop using claims which cannot prove their beneficial effect on consumers' health¹.

The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) hails this as a major step forward in protecting consumers from dubious marketing practices.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC said:

"It is a huge week of change for European consumers. Unsubstantiated and misleading claims should finally disappear from the shelves. This will help prevent consumers being led to believe that a certain product has significant health advantages which don't stand up to scientific scrutiny. Europe's food industry should present facts, not spurious claims.

"The ball is now in the court of national authorities to monitor if industry plays by the rules and penalise those who don't."

Lots of work still to be done

However, much remains to be done. It is clear that using claims on food high in fat, salt or sugar (e.g. chocolate, sweets, and biscuits) should not be allowed as it masks how unhealthy such products are. Adding a dose of vitamins or minerals – for which health claims are allowed – to a food which is high in fat or sugar will not make the product less unhealthy. This is why BEUC encourages legislators to urgently define nutrient profiles at EU level.

ENDS

¹ Claims which could not be substantiated include:

- Green tea helps maintain normal blood pressure
- Royal jelly benefits the immune system and/or vitality
- Taurine (found in energy drinks), when combined with vitamins and minerals, boosts mental performance
- Glucosamine helps maintain joints

Approved claims include:

- Calcium is needed for the maintenance of normal healthy bones
- Reduced consumption of saturated fat contributes to the maintenance of normal cholesterol levels
- Reduced consumption of sodium contributes to the maintenance of normal blood pressure
- Melatonin helps reduce the time it takes to fall asleep
- Plant sterols and plant stanols (used in margarines and yoghurts) contribute to the maintenance of normal cholesterol levels