Ensuring consumer confidence in health and nutrition claims

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The Netherlands Nutrition Centre:

- Encourages consumers to develop and maintain healthy and more sustainable eating habits and the food industry to produce a more sustainable range of food products. The Netherlands Nutrition Centre is funded by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Innovation and the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare & Sport.
Ensuring consumer confidence in health and nutrition claims

- Getting it right for consumers
  - Consumers expectations
  - Recommendations from a consumers perspective
Consumers expect:

- High quality of substantiation
- Evaluation by an expert panel
- Clear, comprehensible claims that are preferably specified concerning the benefits for the consumer
- Measures to increase correct interpretation
Consumers expect:

- High quality of substantiation
- Effect proven
- Protection against misleading claims
- Protection against undesirable effects
Consumers expect:

- Evaluation by an expert panel
- Top experts in the field
Consumers expect:

- Clear, comprehensible claims that are preferably specified concerning the benefits for the consumer
  - Translation
  - Specified effects
  - Consumer groups
Consumers expect:

- “Good night”
- “Follow up milk for a satiated feeling during the night”
  - Who? How long?
Consumers expect:

- Measures to increase correct interpretation
Consumers expect:

- “Prevents extreme overweight and excessive eating”
- “Contributes to a balanced diet”
- “For substantial weight loss and the treatment of obesity”
Consumers expect:

- Dutch “Light” claim =
  - ≤ 30% kcal or sugar or fat

- 29% think light means less kcal and sugar and fat
- 30% think light means ≤ 50% kcal
- 25% read the label rigorously
- 88% wants to see directly on which aspect the product is light
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- EFSA guidance on the scientific requirements for health claims related to appetite ratings, weight management, and blood glucose concentrations is a gain for consumers.
  - Suggestions from a consumers point of view
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- Studies/outcome measures appropriate for substantiation of claims
  - No pre-established formula
  - Development golden standard
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- Claims on appetite: criteria is reduction in energy intake -> not very specific
- Claims on body weight maintenance after weight loss: “...maintenance of weight loss in overweight and obese subjects without achieving a normal body weight is considered a beneficial physiological effect.” -> more specific
- Why not SMART?
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- Claims should be scientifically substantiated by taking into account the totality of the available scientific data, and by weighing the evidence, and shall demonstrate the extent to which:
  - *(a) the claimed effect of the food is beneficial for human health*
    - “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO) vs. no unbeneficial effect
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- (b) a cause and effect relationship is established between consumption of the food and the claimed effect in humans (such as: the strength, consistency, specificity, dose-response, and biological plausibility of the relationship)

  - Criteria that lead to beneficial effects
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- (c) the quantity of the food and pattern of consumption required to obtain the claimed effect could reasonably be achieved as part of a balanced diet
  - Benefits of effects for people with a balanced diet
  - Benefits of effects for people with an unbalanced diet
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- *(d) the specific study group(s) in which the evidence was obtained is representative of the target population for which the claim is intended*
  - Criteria: age, weight, BMI, etc.
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- “Nevertheless, the wording used to make health claims should be truthful, clear, reliable and useful to the consumer in choosing a healthy diet.”
- Role for consumer organisations
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- “The specificity of the wording is very important.”

- "Substance X supports the function of the joints" = X

- "Substance X helps maintain the flexibility of the joints“ = V
  - Missing how long and how much
Recommendations from a consumers perspective

- EFSA guidance on the scientific requirements for health claims related to appetite ratings, weight management, and blood glucose concentrations is a gain for consumers. Suggested improvements are:
  - More specific criteria for substantiation of appetite related claims (e.g. size of study in relation to size of effect)
  - More specific criteria for components of appetite related claims (e.g. the use of words such as ‘increases’, ‘decreases’, ‘delays’, etc.)
  - Increase chances for consumers to benefit from innovation
Pick up something for my joints, would you dear?