

2.8 Labeling

Front of pack nutrition and eco labelling for promoting healthy and sustainable diets in points-of-sale and out-of-home

What problem is your solution addressing?

Unhealthy diets are among the top leading causes of disease, death, undernutrition, obesity and climate change globally. Only a minority of the public is aware that their diets have an impact on the environment (e.g., 10 percent in the EU), and even fewer know that different food types have varying impact, and which are best for the environment. Front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) is an important policy tool for countries to help consumers make healthier food choices. A large part of the population today has access to a huge variety of foods and drinks high in fats, sugars and salt/sodium. However, it is not easy for consumers to decide and differentiate what should be part of a healthy and sustainable diet. Nutrition information is often presented in confusing and unhelpful ways with attractive packaging (often targeted at children or mothers). This approach to packaging causes unhealthy products to be more desirable, especially in contrast to unbranded healthier options such as fresh fruits and vegetables or breastfeeding. FOPL supports consumers to make informed food purchases and healthier eating choices. Badging meals and food products that are better for the environment in a way that is simple and compelling for consumers to understand, can be highly effective.

How does your solution address the problem?

Public health rationale:

- Research has consistently shown an association between use of nutrition labels and healthier diets.^{1,2,3}
- Actual use of the most common form of nutrition labelling (nutrient declarations on the back of food package labels), however, is low and there are significant problems with understanding and interpretation of such labels, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups.^{4,5,6,7,8}
- Widespread use of nutrition and health claims on labels can mislead and confuse consumers with mixed messages about healthy eating.⁹

¹ Campos S, Doxey J, Hammond D. Nutrition labels on pre-packaged foods: a systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2011; 14(8): p. 1496-1506.

² Drichoutis AC, Lazaridis P, M NR. Consumers' use of nutritional labels: A review of research studies and issues. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*. 2006;(9).

³ Volkova E, Ni Mhurchu C. The influence of nutrition labeling and point-of-purchase information on food behaviours. *Current Obesity Reports*. 2015 March; 4(1): p. 19-29.

⁴ Campos et al, 2011. *Op cit*.

⁵ Drichoutis et al, 2006. *Op cit*.

⁶ Cowburn G, Stockley L. Consumer understanding and use of nutrition labelling: a systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2005; 8(1): p. 21-28.

⁷ Hawley KL, Roberto CA, Bragg MA, Liu PJ, Schwartz MB, Brownell KD. The science on front-of-package food labels. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2012; 16(3): p. 430-439.

⁸ Ni Mhurchu C, Gorton D. Nutrition labels and claims in New Zealand and Australia: a review of use and understanding.. *Australian And New Zealand Journal Of Public Health*. 2007; 31(2): p. 105-12.

⁹ Hawkes C. Nutrition labels and health claims: the global regulatory environment. Geneva: WHO; 2004.

- FOPL may be a comprehensive action to address unhealthy diets and help move consumers toward more plant-based, sustainable diets and reduced obesogenic environments, such as in schools, improving diet quality, human health and wellbeing, social equity, and respond to climate change challenges.¹⁰

Consumer awareness is facilitated by systems that are widely adopted across the retail supply. Consumers' ability to choose is empowering and is assisted by labels that contain interpretive elements (e.g. meaningful colours), nutrition information, dull icons (e.g. foot print), and ecolabel per consumer segment (eco-conscious, price, origin, ethnic),¹¹ whereas motivation to use front-of-pack labelling may be supported by food rating system, quick to interpret and that apply across foods and drinks. FOPL is a recognized cost-effective policy to address the rising prevalence of obesity, NCDs and climate change. To have the widest impact, a web-based health and environmental labelling of foods system can be used. Thus, the aim is to provide convenient, relevant and readily understood nutrition and environment information or guidance on food packs or menus, to assist all consumers, particularly children, and promote reformulation as well.

FOPL is a context specific intervention where the type of label and its characteristics should be tailored to the population that will use it, where packaged food is available and prepared food is sold. It can include an image (e.g., a traffic light), icons (e.g., a star or a keyhole), and messages to inform the consumer.

It is also key to acknowledge that still 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet¹² and therefore have little agency and choice about what to eat. Therefore, FOPL should not be a stand-alone intervention but should be part of a package of interventions designed by the country to address malnutrition in all its forms and possibly reducing the environmental impact of food.

The World Health Organization has developed a number of evidence-based guiding principles for FOPL for promoting healthy diets¹³ and also recommends mandatory labelling of trans fatty acids to allow monitoring of industry compliance with the mandatory trans fatty acids limits.¹⁴

Codex Alimentarius is preparing guidelines on front-of-pack nutrition labelling.¹⁵

Is this a new solution or an existing solution that needs scaling?

Existing solution in need of scaling.

¹⁰ Swingburg BA. The global syndemic of obesity, undernutrition and climate change: The Lancet commission report. *Lancet* 2019 Feb 23;393(10173):791-846. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32822-8.

¹¹ Banovic M. A cross-cultural perspective on impact of health and nutrition claims, country-of-origin and eco-label on consumer choice of new aquaculture products. *Food Res Int* 2019 Sep;123:36-47. doi: 10.1016/j.foodres.2019.04.031.

¹² SOFI (2020) <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2020/en/>

¹³ World Health Organization. WHO Guiding Principles and Framework Manual for Front-of-Pack Labelling for Promoting Healthy Diets. Geneva; 2019.

¹⁴ World Health Organization. REPLACE trans fat: An action package to eliminate industrially-produced trans fatty acids. Geneva: WHO; 2018.

¹⁵ Codex Committee of Food Labelling. Guidelines on front of pack nutrition labelling (FOPL) systems. <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/committee/related-electronic-working-groups/pt/?committee=CCFL>

Which organization/s, institution/s or group of individuals are associated with the solution?

World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/policies/guidingprinciples-labelling-promoting-healthydiet/en/>,

Food and Agriculture Organization: <http://www.fao.org/food-labelling/en/#:~:text=A%20food%20label%2C%20the%20information,communicating%20information%20to%20the%20consumer.&text=This%20information%2C%20which%20includes%20items,food%20to%20promote%20its%20sale>,

The United Kingdom:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/packaging-and-labelling>, European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/labelling_legislation/nutrition-labelling_en,

World Obesity Federation: <https://www.worldobesity.org/>, Chile:

<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CA1962B/>, Vital strategies, University of North

Carolina: <https://www.vitalstrategies.org/>, National Institute of Public Health, Mexico:

www.insp.mx, World Resources Institute, John Hopkins, Princeton University, Oxford

University, The George Institute for Global Health, Imperial College London, Nuffield

Department of Population Health. Sustainable food, diet and non-communicable disease

prevention: <https://www.ndph.ox.ac.uk/food-ncd/archive/research-projects/the-myshop-app-for-healthy-food-purchases>,

Bloomberg Food Policy Program and its partner organizations

such as: Vital Strategies, the Global Food Research Program at the University of North

Carolina, Chapel Hill and the Global Health Advocacy Incubator, Resolve to Save Lives, an

initiative of Vital Strategies, education sectors, Consumers International, WTO, Member

states

If selected as a game-changing solution, how will you leverage the UN Food Systems Summit to scale your solution?

There already exists an Action Network on Labelling under the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), co-chaired by Chile, France and Australia with 19 Member States interested to work on that or already working on the issue. Countries share experience and conduct webinars for faster results.

Through the UN Food System Summit provide the forum to share, discuss and dialogue to a diverse and multisectoral audience from across the globe—that are an essential part of the food environment, a cost-effective solution in combating obesity and helping consumers in making sustainable and healthier food consumption choices. Major businesses may adopt the label around the world but would need to comply to national laws and trade agreements.

Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape or other type of setting (e.g. high- or low-income countries, aquaculture)? If so, please specify.

It is applicable for all type of settings. Information presented on food products through a food label, is one of the most important and direct means of communicating information to the consumer. Regardless of gender, geography, and income. To be effective, labelling needs to be part of a package of interventions and be based on local context.

Who are the main actors that would put this action into place?

Policymakers (government), Private sector, UN agencies, Public Health Authorities

Source and process

- World Health Organization, AT2 UN Anchor agency
- World Obesity Federation through public survey