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Aspects Concerning the Labeling of Alimentary Products in the EU

Elena Condrea

“Ovidius” University of Constanta, Faculty of Economics Sciences,
Dumbrava Rosie st. 5, code 900613, Tel. 0745.18.50.18
Email: elenacondrea2003@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The main purpose of the labeling of alimentary product is offering the consumers sufficient information thus the consumer can take a fundamental buying decision, after which he will act, deposit and prepare, respectively consume the aliments in an adequate and safe mode.

The foods must not be presented in a manner that will confuse the consumer in what concerns the nature, composition or quality. When we say this thing, we refer to the “label”, as well as to the shape of the product’s package, the way it is put in the shelf/presentation in order to sell it.

Key words: Labeling, label, alimentary products, legal labeling conditions, consumer.

1 – Introduction

In our society, the label of merchandise represents a main instrument of the releasing of the buy-sell act, being at the same time a simple and fast information means. The increase of the prelucrare grade, the diversification of the merchandise assortment, the evolution of packaging and advertisement, has increased the role of the label.

Generally, the conditions concerning the content, label information detail grade, language and certain aspect concerning the form/mode of presentation of the information, are regulated by the governments/institutions at national level; the producers of alimentary goods, respectively of labels, have a low control concerning the label and labeling.

At the end of the XX century, have intensified the concerns on the labeling of the alimentary merchandise on global level, which has lead to the elaboration and publication of numerous regulations with international character (in commercial codes, international or regional standards, other law acts).

In what concerns the EU regarding the labeling of alimentary products, we can affirm that there have been elaborated numerous Regulation and Directives with obligatory or recommendation character. These make reference to the labeling of the aliments at the general mode, as well as the labeling of the alimentary products of animal origin.

The EU regulations do not need to be legislated; they are directly applicable to all the member states. As content, in these regulations are presented recommendations, opinions and/or decisions of the Justice European Court which are important for the interpretation of the law at EU member state. In the directives there are presented the objectives that must be implemented in the national law of each EU member state.

2 – General aspects concerning the label, respectively the labeling of alimentary products

The label and, respectively the labeling have, firstly, the role of offering information to the tradesmen and consumers, but also the promotion of the respective product.

So, concerning the function it must accomplish, the label can be:

- *Persuasive label* – puts accent on the product's promotion, on convincing the consumer to buy the product through the evidentiarea, not through the information it contains;
- *Informational label* – offers numerous information to the consumer, helping him to select, respectively buy the product fit for his necessities.

In conformity with the law in the USA, the labels can be of three types, more exactly:

- *Brand label* – it is identified with the mark applied on the label/package; it does not offer sufficient information regarding the product, it does not help the consumer in deciding wither to buy the product or not;
- *Informative label* – offers multiple information regarding the product: composition, energy value, preserving conditions, use/consumption instructions, certain quality characteristics;
- *Grade label* – it indicates, through a letter, digit or word, the quality level/quality class of the product.

Concerning the grade label, the problem is deciding if this type of label is compulsory or not.

In the last years, the intense concerns regarding environment protection have lead to the so-called *voluntary ecological labels*, which are used, mostly, as marketing technique in sales' promotion. These labels can be of 2 types:

- *Ecological marketing labels* – they contain statements of the producers and suppliers like: the product contains several properties and specified ecologic qualities;
- *Eco-labels* – they are ecological labels approved by a governmental or independent private organism; it supplies the message that the product does not harm the environment in all of its life cycle and satisfies the requirements regarding environment protection.

To respond to all the requirements of the tradesmen, the labels must:

- Be attractive;
- Work properly as an advertisement material at the selling point;
- Present information regarding the mark (is the main mode in which the product is recognized by the buyer at the repeating of the purchasing).

At the same time, when a label is conceived, respectively when a product is labeled, it must have in view more rules/principles, among them:

- The images/illustrations/photos must be representative for the alimentary product which is bought by the consumer;
- The background images must not confuse the consumer regarding the type, origin and quality of the products.

2.1 – The legal conditions for labeling the alimentary products

In conformity with the EU legislation, but our country as well, at the elaboration of a label there must be considered the fact that it must contain at least the following elements:

- The product's name;
- The net and/or brute weight of the product;
- The list of ingredients, inclusively the allergens, if it is the case;
- The energy value of the product;
- QUID;
- The viability period;
- The depositing/preserving conditions (and transport conditions, if needed);

- The preparation/utilization conditions (if it is the case);
- The name and address of the producer/importer/supplier;
- The origin (especially when its misplacement can confuse the consumer: Salam de Sibiu made in Bacau).

2.2 – The name of the alimentary product

In what concerns the name of the product, it can be:

- *The usual name* – with time, it will be accepted as it is by the consumers, without other explanations. *Surimi; Fish fingers* etc.
- *Descriptive name* – it indicates the real nature of the product, distinguishing it from other products with which it could be confused. *Natural yogurt with apricot pulp; Natural carrot and apple juice* etc.
- *Legislation described name* – they are specified by the E.U. legislation and international one, it can be used for certain alimentary products, like: *coffee, sugar, honey, flour* etc.

It must be remembered that a commerce mark can not replace the real name of the alimentary product.

2.3 – Ingredients list, including the allergens, GMO (genetically modified organisms)

Even if the main ingredients are found in the name of the product, they must be mentioned in the ingredient list as well, among the other prime materials. It must be mentioned that the ingredients are put in the decreasing order of the contribution they have in the fabrication recipe and for the main ones – main prime materials – it must be specified the percentage they have in the product.

For the beverages which contain more than 1.2% alcohol, it is compulsory for the percentage to be on the label.

In the alimentary products there can be found 2 categories of allergens, respectively:

- Allergens in the ingredients;
- Allergens resulting from mixed contamination.

Indifferently of the category, if they are found in the alimentary product they must be specified on the label.

In conformity the guide for the alimentary industry hygiene, the list of allergens contains:

- Cereals containing gluten – grain, rye, barley, oats and their hybrids;
- Crustaceans and related products;
- Egg and egg products;
- Nut-like fruits and products obtained from them – nuts, , peanuts, whole nuts, pasticcio etc.;
- Milk and milky products which contain lactose;
- Soy ad soy products;
- Mustard and mustard products;
- Celery and celery products;
- Sesame seeds and products obtained from them;
- Sulfur dioxide and sulfites with concentrations larger than 10 mg/kg or 10 mg/l.

It is recommended the use of simple fonts for the specification of the allergens, with the minimum size of 10 points; the names should be visible and readable.

Also, there should be distinction between the ingredients, allergen-ingredients and mixed contaminated-allergens.

<p>Ingredients Milk, sugar, peach, flavouring</p>	<p>Contains Egg, wheat May Contain Peanuts</p>
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2.4 – The energy value of the product

The list of ingredients is accompanied by the declaration of the Energy Value (VE) and, where it is the case, the list of the main nutritional value substances (for each element the quantity is specified), respectively the Nutritional Value.

On the label of a product the following expressions can be added:

- *Product with low energy value* – only if the VE of a mass/volume unit from the respective product is larger that a $\frac{3}{4}$ of the VE it equivalent with the mass/volume unit of a similar product which does not make this objection.

- *Product with lowered energy value* – only if the VE of the product is smaller than 167 kJ/100 g, respectively 167 kJ/100 ml (40 kcal/100 g, respectively 40 kcal/100 g). In the case of unprepared aliments, with lowered natural VE, on the label this expression must be added.
- *Product without energy value* – only if the respective product has a lower content of 0.5 fats/100 g (100 ml) product. The affirmation “X% without fat” is forbidden.

2.5 – Validity term

It is compulsory that on every label of an alimentary product the validity term is written. It can be written in any of the following modes:

- *To be consumed/use, preferably, until the date of.....;*
- *Valid until;*
- *Fabricated/prepared in the date of Valid for ... hours/days.*

2.6 – Depositing-preserving conditions. Utilization/preparation conditions

In some cases, the labels of alimentary products must contain information regarding the mode/conditions of utilization, respectively the special preserving/depositing conditions.

For example:

- Shake well before consumption;
- Use it in the period of x hours/days after thudding;
- Use it in the period of x hours/days after opening the package;
- Do not refreeze after thudding;
- Do not thud before use.

Beside these elements, the label of the product can contain more specific information for the nutritional labeling, consumption arguments, illustrations etc.

The FSA recommendations – Food Standards Agency – regarding the mode in which the information can be replayed which hold of the composition of a product are orientating principles of the indication/information scheme written on a label, the producers/suppliers are allowed to develop their own formats. It is important that these writings are readable, clear, and easily understandable by the consumer.

3 – Conclusions

In conformity with the E.U. legislation, the alimentary products will not be accompanied by labels which describe them in a wrong or confusing manner in what concerns the nature, composition or the quality of these aliments.

The information with a compulsory character on the labels must be visible, clear, readable, translated in the language in which the product is dispatched (in case it is dispatched in another country), easily understandable by the consumer, without room for interpretation.

The labeling must not confuse the consumer through he suggestion that the respective product has special characteristics, which, in fact, are found in all the other products similar to it, through the attribution of properties it does not have.

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