



## California Department of Public Health Food and Drug Branch



### LABELING

All ingredients in the finished food product must be listed on the label by their “common” or “usual” name. Products with unusual or non-English names may not be acceptable. A good reference to determine if a name is “common” or “usual” is a standard dictionary.

The ingredient list must be in descending order of predominance by weight (i.e. the ingredient in the largest amount is listed first; followed by ingredient in the next largest amount, etc.). Label designations have been established by Federal regulation.

A summary of labeling requirements is available on the [FDB webpage](#). Complete labeling requirements may be found in [Title 21, Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\), Part 101](#).

#### **Label approvals**

FDB does not approve labels. However, FDB Investigators conduct label reviews during inspections and when requests for export certificates are received. Food manufacturers are responsible for the accuracy and compliance of all labels. FDB recommends that food firms contact qualified consultants when technical assistance is required.

#### **Expiration dates, sell by dates, lot codes**

There are only a few products that require “sell by” or “expiration dates”.

Dairy products have open dating requirements enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Infant formula is required to bear a date in order to ensure full nutritional value. Even though the majority of foods do not require “expiration” or “sell by dates”, most consumers expect some way to tell the age of a product.

Date and other codes are recommended for foods because they identify when a product was made. This helps manufacturers and retailers to trace and rotate inventories properly. Lot and date codes allow for the easy identification and removal of suspect products during recalls, thereby limiting the risk to consumers and reducing the economic impact upon businesses.

#### **Nutrition labeling requirements?**

The “[Nutrition Labeling and Education Act](#) (NLEA)” requires most processed and packaged foods to provide information about the nutritional content of food. These facts are placed under the heading “Nutrition Facts” on the product label. Firms may determine the nutritional content of the food through laboratory analysis or they can obtain the nutritional information from an FDA-approved database. To obtain a list of trade organizations with approved databases, contact the “FDA Office of Nutritional products, Labeling, and Dietary Supplements” at 5100 Paint Branch Parkway, College Park, Maryland 20740 (FAX: 301-436-2639).