

New label warnings for high vitamin or mineral content

BY SUSAN BIRKS

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised manufacturers that food supplement products with high levels of certain vitamins or minerals should carry warnings for consumers on their labels. The aim of the advice is to alert consumers to the potential for adverse effects.

The decision was made based on findings of the UK's Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals (EVM) back in May 2003. These suggested that while the majority of food supplement products sold in the UK contain vitamins and minerals in amounts well below the safe upper levels set by the EVM, a small number of products contain higher amounts, which could cause adverse effects in some individuals.

These include some products containing vitamin C, iron, calcium, magnesium, nickel, beta-carotene, nicotinic acid, zinc, man-

ganese, phosphorus, and vitamin B6.

In such cases the FSA wants warnings on pack labels. Following discussions with industry representatives, the FSA has issued a list of advisory label statements on its website and has suggested reformulations for the vitamins beta-carotene, nicotinic acid and vitamin B6.

For example, a product containing over the recommended daily amount of 1000mg of vitamin C must say on the label "1000mg of vitamin C may cause mild stomach upset in sensitive individuals".

It says the timings of label changes should take place as soon as possible but may be made to coincide with other new labelling requirements.

The advice will also be sent to the European Commission (EC) with a view to incorporating it in future EC regulations.

Maize flour use gets a boost

A new maize germ flour high in nutrients and having an extended shelf-life is being marketed by Limagrain Cereals Ingredients.

Nutricorn is a stabilised maize germ flour with a shelf-life of six months, which can be used to make bread, cereals, snacks and biscuits for consumers who are wheat intolerant. It has distinct texture, taste and colour, which in bread gives a more dense and colourful crumb and a darker crust and in cereals more crunch and a popcorn-type flavour.

The extended shelf-life offers a huge practical advantage over standard maize germ flour which only has a shelf-life of one month.

Previous attempts to stabilise maize germ and increase shelf-life have affected the nutritional content. But Limagrain says it has developed a process which achieves this without chemical treatment and which does not affect the nutrient value of the flour.

The flour is naturally rich in dietary fibre,



Maize germ flour could offer wheat alternative

antioxidants, vitamin E, omega 6 unsaturated fat and vegetable proteins. It is also rich in magnesium. "In Europe the daily recommended intake (RDI) of magnesium is 300mg. To get 50% of this RDI, we need 150g of chocolate, or 0.25 litres of mineral water or 5.3g of wheat germ compared with only 30g of Nutricorn," explains Dr Walter Lopez, senior nutritionist with the grain specialist Limagrain.

Probiotic benefits for patients



Probiotics could help the well and the sick

New work being carried out by the University of Reading hopes to discover whether probiotic products can be beneficial in the treatment of autistic children.

When researchers at Reading University screened stool samples from 150 autistic US-based children they found a prevalence of the toxin-producing bacteria clostridia. A study on the gut flora of 60 British children also showed clostridia was high in the autistic children but not in their brothers and sisters.

Strains of probiotic bacteria are now being screened to see which will interfere against clostridia and human trials will start this year.

Meanwhile, probiotic use is also helping hospital patients. Catherine Collins, chief dietician at St George's Hospital in London says probiotics are useful in treating antibiotic-associated diarrhoea. The hospital now puts live bio-yoghurts on the menu for sufferers.

Contaminants in foodstuffs

Contaminants create problems that seem to plague meat and fish producers, as was highlighted in the press earlier this year with the Scottish salmon industry coming under fire over levels of organic contaminants in salmon meat.

European Commission regulation EC 684/2004 was published in April amending regulation EC 466/2001, which sets the maximum levels for certain contaminants in foodstuffs. This regulation clarifies certain food sources and the appropriate limits for dioxin levels. Specifically, the following amendments are made under section 5 of annex 1: 'liver and derived products' becomes 'liver and derived products originating from terrestrial animals'; 'fish and fishery products' is supplemented with an indication that the maximum level also applies where the fish is intended to be consumed whole; 'vegetable oil' is clarified as 'vegetable oils and fats'.

Although the maximum levels were applicable from the July 1, 2002, the compliance set for free-range or semi-intensive eggs was extended until January 10, 2004. However, this date has passed, and investigations are still ongoing to define measures to reduce dioxin levels in these products so the date has been extended to January 1, 2005.

While legislation sets the maximum levels of contaminants for foodstuffs, this is clearly an ongoing issue, particularly as new food scares sell newspapers, and industry then has to handle consumer concerns, which tend to take no heed of legislated maximum levels.

With this in mind, and in line with the requirement to apply risk assessment and risk management to food safety (under regulation EC 178/2002), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has announced a scientific colloquium on the methodologies and principles for setting tolerable intake levels for dioxins, furans and dioxin-like PCB, to be held in Brussels on June 28-29 (see the EFSA website).

The aims are to examine the different approaches taken by authorities around the globe on assessing risk, which ultimately leads to legislation on maximum levels. Perhaps the recommendations could move towards a more harmonised global approach to regulating contaminants in foodstuffs.

Jean Feord, business manager for legislation, Leatherhead Food International.
www.leatherheadfood.com

