

**GDA**  
labels

# Improving the food literacy of consumers



Food and Drink  
Federation



Making a real difference

# Companies committed to using GDA labelling in the UK

A G Barr plc	Coca-Cola	Honey Monster Foods	Nisa-Today	Tesco
Aarhuskarlshamn UK	Continental Bakeries	Hormel Foods	Northern Foods	The Real Potato Company
Albert Bartlett	Cottage Delight	Intersnacks UK	Novotel Hotels	The Speldhurst Sausage Company
Aldi	Cumbrian Seafoods	Jack Link's	P Chocolate	Traidcraft
Alpro	Danone	Kellogg's	Pally Biscuits	Tryton Foods
Apetito	Discovery foods	Kerry Foods	PepsiCo	Tunnocks
Associated British Foods	Dorset cereals	Kestrel Foods	Premier Foods	Uin Foods
Baker-Bennetts	Dr Oetker	Kinnerton	Pro Pak Foods	Unilever UK
Berry World	Evron Foods	Confectionary	Procter & Gamble	United Biscuits
Bird's Eye	Findus	Kraft Food UK	R & R Icecream	Villa Soft Drinks
Bokomo Foods	Fine Foods	Liberation Foods	Raynor Foods	Warburtons
Borderfields	International	Lidl	Ricola	Westler Foods
Bradbury and Son	Florette	Look-O-Look UK	Seabrook Crisps	Woodwin Catering
Brakes Food Service	Fresh Retail	Mars UK	Shloer	Ye Olde Oak
Brioche Pasquier UK	General Mills	McNeil Nutritionals	Silver Spring	Youngs Seafood
Britvic	Gerber	Morrison's	So Good	
Burtens Foods	GlaxoSmithKline	Napier Brown Foods	Spar	
Cadbury	Golden Wonder	Nestlé UK	Struik	
Calypso	Goodlife Foods	Netto	Tate and Lyle	
	Hain Celestial	Nichols		

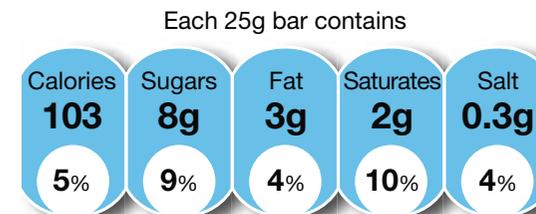
**Food and Drink Federation** 

## Making a real difference

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of an adult's guideline daily amount

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“ GDA labelling is an objective way of providing nutritional information and helping consumers construct a healthy, balanced diet ”

# Leading the debate on nutrition labelling

As the voice of the UK's largest manufacturing sector, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) has a passionate belief that the best outcomes for society will be delivered when industry and policy makers work together in a genuine partnership to make food safer, healthier and more environmentally sustainable.

Our members have shown real leadership in recent years in supporting key areas of public policy. But it is arguably our groundbreaking work in the area of health and wellbeing where we have been making the biggest difference to the lives of consumers – whether through our reformulation efforts, the development of 'better for you' products or the introduction of clearer on-pack nutritional information. FDF and its members published a health and wellbeing action plan way back in 2004 – an early sign of the positive role our industry could play in helping society tackle complex challenges such as growing rates of obesity. This plan included a public commitment to provide clearer nutrition labelling on food and drink packs, as we recognised this would be a powerful tool for helping consumers make better informed choices and improving their overall food literacy.

Five years ago, there was little nutritional information carried on the front of most food and drink products sold in the UK. Today, that has all changed – thanks to the enormous commitment shown by manufacturers and retailers who have voluntarily incorporated this information on their packs. In fact, GDA labelling is by far the most popular scheme in use in the UK. This voluntary industry scheme has been adopted by more than 90 manufacturers, retailers and caterers and we estimate that more than 20,000 products carry this information on the front of their packs.

Why front-of-pack labelling based on GDAs? Well, it's our belief that labelling should not dictate food choices from on high. Rather, it should be both objective – allowing consumers to interpret it in relation to their own requirements – and consistent with the concept of encouraging consumers to achieve a balanced diet within the context of their personal lifestyle.

GDA information has been appearing on the back of food and drink packs in the UK for more than a decade – so it always made sense for us to take that information and put it on the front. More important, the scheme is built on strong scientific foundations – the reference values we use have recently been endorsed by the European Food Safety Authority.

Unlike other labelling systems, such as those based on traffic lights, we believe that GDAs are an objective way of providing nutritional information and helping consumers construct a healthy, balanced diet through developing their nutritional knowledge. When consumers make informed choices for themselves, through higher levels of food literacy, we believe they are more likely to stick with those good habits, rather than when someone 'tells' them to make such choices.

This is particularly true when it comes to society's concerns about growing levels of obesity across Europe – where the provision of clear on-pack information about calories, on a per portion basis, will clearly be one important tool for policy makers looking for solutions to this complex issue.

FDF and its members are proud of the fact that the UK's pioneering work to develop labelling based on GDAs is now being taken up by manufacturers, retailers and caterers right across Europe.

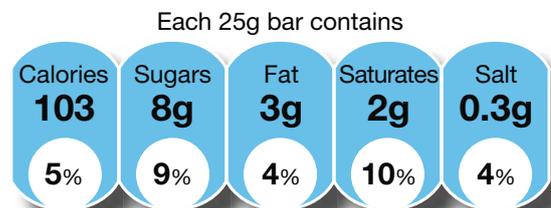
The DVD supplied with this report details our approach since 2006 and explains how UK manufacturers communicated GDA labelling to consumers via a £4m education campaign that independent evaluation shows helped to raise awareness, understanding and usage of the information being provided on packs.

Challenges remain – not least in encouraging more consumers to make use of the information now available on food and drink packs. But our experiences show how voluntary action undertaken by industry can make a real difference for consumers – boosting their food literacy and helping them to make better-informed choices.

## A brief history of GDA labelling



- Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) for calories, fat and saturated fat were first set in 1998, following collaboration between the UK Government, the food industry and consumer organisations – overseen by the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD). They were intended to translate science into consumer-friendly information; providing guidelines to help consumers contextualise the nutrition information on food labels.
- These GDAs were based on the recommendations of the UK Government’s Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) report on Dietary Reference Values. To date, this report has not been superseded and still stands as the basis for dietary recommendations in the UK.
- From 1998, GDA values began appearing, on a voluntary basis, on the back of food and drink packs in the UK.
- In 2004, GDAs were reviewed, developed and extended to include values for carbohydrates, sugars, protein, salt and fibre, following a review by a group of experts, again under the auspices of IGD.
- Interest in providing front-of-pack nutrition information began to build in the UK from November 2004, following publication of the Government’s Public Health White Paper, which called for the introduction of front-of-pack nutrition labelling.
- In early 2006, FDF members publicly announced they would launch a voluntary scheme based on GDAs – taking information that had long been provided on the back of UK packs and highlighting it on the front, so that consumers could easily see what was inside the products they were buying.
- In early 2007, FDF members launched a £4m consumer education campaign (including TV advertising shown above) to educate consumers about the new information appearing on food packs – and encouraging them to use it.
- In March 2009 the European Food Safety Authority published its opinion on proposed reference intake levels for Europe, which were found to be consistent with the figures behind the GDAs developed in the UK.
- By 2010, more than 90 UK food and drink companies were carrying GDA information on the front of their products.



of an adult’s guideline daily amount

# Does front-of-pack nutrition labelling work?

Research carried out for the Food and Drink Federation by independent consultancy Millward Brown between 2006 and 2008 shows that industry's efforts to educate consumers about the benefits of using GDAs have paid off – with our campaign resulting in high levels of awareness (83%), understanding (80%) and claimed usage (63%) of the front-of-pack labels.

Since then, other independent consumer research projects have confirmed the positive impact of GDA labelling.

In 2008, the European Food Information Council carried out a pan-European study in which it questioned more than 17,000 people in six EU countries and found that 27% of UK consumers regularly looked for nutrition information on food packaging (compared with an average of 18% for Europeans as a whole) and that well-established systems such as GDAs were widely recognised and understood by shoppers. In April 2009, the first part of a major EU study called FLABEL (Food Labelling to Enhance Better Education for Life) was published and revealed that GDAs were by far the most dominant labelling system in Europe – appearing on an average of 25% of packs, rising to 63% in the UK.

More recently, the UK's Food Standards Agency has revealed the results of a significant programme of research to evaluate the impact of front-of-pack nutrition signpost labelling schemes on purchasing behaviour and consumer knowledge.

Based on an independent expert review of the research, we believe it shows that all the major schemes operating in the UK (GDAs, traffic lights and hybrid combinations of both) are well understood and are particularly effective in enabling consumers to make comparisons between products.

The Food Standards Agency has proposed that UK industry moves voluntarily towards a complex triple hybrid labelling system – comprising GDA information on a per-portion basis overlaid with either text (the words 'high, medium and low') and/or traffic light colours.

But we remain concerned that there is not enough evidence in the research to conclude that such a triple hybrid solution outperforms other label formats – in fact, the more complex the label, the longer it takes consumers to interpret the information.

Given the discussions now underway within the EU Institutions on a new Food Information Regulation, we think it would be premature for the UK to agree further labelling initiatives in the absence of any certainty about the future legislative framework for the provision of nutrition information.

It is clear that consumers value the information. So we support any measures designed to increase use of the information currently available, particularly when it complements other public health initiatives in the UK (such as the provision of calorie per portion information on catering menus).

**For more information on all these research projects, please visit: [www.gdalabel.org.uk](http://www.gdalabel.org.uk)**



**Boosting food literacy: industry's GDA campaign**

# Know what's going inside you

Most foods are not eaten in 100g servings. That's why GDA labels tell consumers what percentage of their Guideline Daily Amount for calories, sugars, fat, saturates and salt, each portion of a product contains. We believe this allows consumers to understand what they are actually eating in the context of their whole diet. And it helps them to compare foods realistically in amounts they are likely to eat.

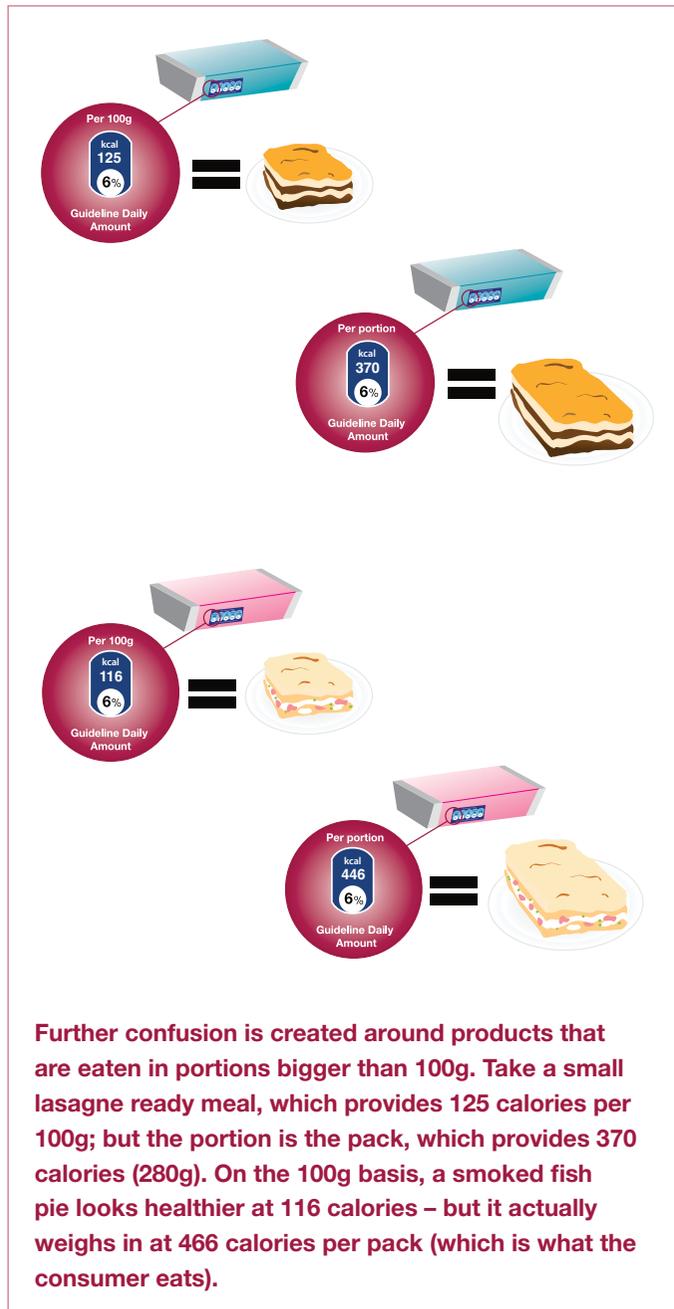
As food is consumed in portions that are significantly different to a 100g baseline, we fear that providing front-of-pack information on that basis may actually mislead consumers and does nothing to improve their food literacy.

Presenting information on a 100g basis also creates difficulties for consumers seeking to make an informed choice between products. For instance: a small wafer biscuit weighing 7.5g can contain just 38 calories, while a chocolate biscuit weighing 12.5g can contain 60 calories. But providing information on a 100g basis would show the wafer containing more calories than the chocolate biscuit (510 versus 480).

Not surprisingly, research suggests that consumers prefer to have factual information presented on a per portion basis. Indeed, the UK Food Standards Agency's proposed principles for front-of-pack labelling support the provision of nutrition information as grams in a specified portion, with the size of that portion described in an easily identifiable way (such as half a pie or one biscuit).

Within categories, there is already a great deal of consistency in the way that GDA adopters currently provide portion information – thus allowing consumers to check, compare and choose between different products, particularly those sold in multi-serve packs. Full comparability is in any case always guaranteed because the 100g information will be available on the back of the pack in the nutrition panel.

**Take a product such as margarine. A generous 10g serving, which is enough to spread on one or two slices of bread, may provide 72 calories; 4% of an average adult's GDA – this is what the consumer will typically eat. But how does the consumer interpret a label that says 100g of that margarine (enough to put on 20 slices of bread) provides 720 calories or 36% of the GDA?**



## Why not colour code?

Food retailers, caterers and manufacturers across Europe have supported the use of Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) labelling as an objective way of providing nutritional information and helping consumers construct a healthy, balanced diet through developing their nutritional knowledge.

A key strength of the GDA scheme is that it is based on facts and does not set out to demonise products that should form part of any healthy, balanced diet.

GDA labels provide nutritional facts on a per portion basis about the food in a pack and show how it would contribute to the diet whereas traffic lights offer an assessment about whether 100g of that product is high, medium or low for a particular nutrient without reference to the total diet or the actual serving size. The GDA scheme also provides clear information about calories – vital in the fight against obesity – which is something that is not easily colour coded.

So we have chosen to use numbers instead of colours because it's a more accurate way for consumers to tell if a portion of a particular food contains a higher or lower amount of a certain nutrient, compared to another product.

This supports our belief that the key to making consumers more food literate lies in encouraging them to look at what's inside the packs they are buying and think about this in the context of their whole diet.