

ECFF POSITION STATEMENT

Nutrition

Manufacturers are constantly developing and improving their foods to meet the changing needs and lifestyles of consumers. Over the last decade, huge social, economic and demographic changes have influenced our eating habits and reduced levels of physical activity. Increasing time pressures, higher disposable incomes, a rise in the number of working women, people living alone and smaller families mean an increased demand for great tasting foods which are quick and easy to prepare. After safety, taste and nutritional quality are the most important criteria for chilled food manufacturers who offer a wide range of foods from low fat products to traditional products. Consumers can make their choice within a wide range of products depending on what they are looking for.

Fat

The amount of fat in any chilled food will vary from food to food reflecting the fat content of the ingredients used. For example, meat naturally contains fat, and so any meat-based food will also contain fat.

Current advice is to limit the consumption of saturated fats because a diet containing too much saturated fat can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood which increases the chance of developing heart disease.

Chilled food manufacturers are aware of these recommendations and take this into account when developing products and recipes. They also provide a further choice of reduced fat ranges for those consumers who want to reduce their fat intake. Nutritional labelling is currently voluntary but for those products carrying nutritional information the amount of fat present is often provided (in grams) on the pack and information on mono- and polyunsaturated fats may also be provided.

Sugar

Sugars, such as sucrose, lactose, fructose and glucose, are a natural component of many foods including milk and fruits. Many chilled foods contain natural sugars but some, such as desserts, will also contain added sugars. In addition, just as chefs add sugar to selected savoury dishes to improve flavour, some manufactured savoury foods may also contain small amounts of added sugar, e.g. sweet and sour dishes, honey glazed meats, sweet chilli dips and some salad dressings. By law, all sugars used as ingredients must be listed in descending order by weight in the ingredients list on the pack and the total sugar content is often provided in nutrition information that is provided voluntarily.

Salt

Salt (sodium chloride) has been used to preserve and flavour food for centuries. In recent years, however, the salt content of our diet has come under scrutiny because of the sodium content. Whilst some sodium is essential in the diet, too much is believed to have an adverse effect on high blood pressure which increases the risk of heart disease. As a result authorities have recommended that we should reduce our consumption of salt¹. Chilled food manufacturers are aware of these recommendations and take this into account when developing products and recipes. A large part of the salt in chilled prepared foods is present via the ingredients. It is only added to foods when it is integral to the recipe. The industry is working to reduce levels where possible. However, not all sodium in our diet comes from salt. Sodium also occurs naturally in a number of forms (and in variable amounts) in a wide variety of foods and ingredients and, just as with home-made foods, some sodium may be present in chilled foods from the ingredients that are used, e.g. from ham or cheese.

¹ WHO, Reducing Salt Intake in Populations: <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/reducingsalt/en/index1.html>
10/9/10

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Nutrition information

If a nutrient content claim (i.e. low in fat, rich in calcium) is made on the label this triggers the legal requirement for nutrition labelling. Many companies voluntarily provide information on:

- The energy value of the food in kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal)
- The amount of protein, carbohydrate and fat in grams (g)

Although optional, unless a specific claim is made, food labels may provide information on the sugar, saturated fat, fibre and sodium contents.

Information may also be provided on the amounts of mono- or polyunsaturated fats. Information has to be given as values per 100g or per 100ml of food. Values per portion size can be given as well.