



June 20, 2005

Division of Dockets Management (HFA-305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane
Room 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

**Response to Docket No. 2004N-0463 Food Labeling: Prominence of Calories
RIN No. 0910-AF22**

Dear Docket Clerk,

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) appreciates the opportunity to offer comment on whether to amend certain provisions of the agency's nutrition labeling regulations to give more prominence to calories on food labels as outlined in Federal Register Docket No. 2004N-0463 Food Labeling: Prominence of Calories. Producer-driven and consumer-focused, NCBA is the trade association of America's cattle farmers and ranchers, and the marketing organization for the largest segment of the nation's food and fiber industry. The beef industry has always supported information in the meat case and throughout all grocery aisles that tells a complete nutrition story and helps consumers make educated purchasing decisions.

NCBA commends the agency for its efforts to understand how consumers use the food label and the information that is most valuable in helping consumers making food choices. NCBA supports the proposition of developing a unified educational system, based on the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid*, that includes tools at point of purchase – such as the food label – to help consumers make the best food choices possible. **NCBA strongly believes any changes to the food label must fundamentally be anchored in consumer research.**

In response to FDA's Federal Register request for comments and data on questions related to proposed changes to the food label, **NCBA conducted a quantitative survey with consumers to determine their preferences for enhanced information about calorie and nutrients on food labels. A total of 800 interviews was completed with consumers based on a random sample of adult food shoppers from an online panel matched to U.S. census data distributions.**

NCBA Label Research: Overview and Key Findings

The NCBA research tested consumer reactions to food labels across food aisles including grain, vegetable, meat, dairy, and mixed food products. **This research strongly suggests that consumers prefer and are more likely to use labels that provide information about *both calories and food group-specific nutrients* to make food choices¹.**

NCBA commissioned Shugoll Research and conducted an online survey with 800 adult food shoppers (June 7 – 9, 2005). To evaluate possible changes to the food label, respondents were asked to evaluate a number of Nutrition Facts Panel (NFP) and Principal Display Panel (PDP) label mock-

ups for one of four product categories: vegetable, grains, meat, or dairy. These four product categories were randomly rotated across respondents. The order of the test labels was also rotated randomly to avoid order bias where front of package (PDP) and NFP label combinations were evaluated. In those cases, all respondents saw all six label design combinations for all four product categories. The order in which labels were presented and the order of the four product categories were rotated across respondents to avoid order bias. The total sample size of 800 provides results that are accurate within plus or minus 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

Analysis of the data from this quantitative study reveals:

- **Although consumers rate the existing label favorably, when shown alternative labels consumers overwhelmingly support the idea of changing the label to provide more information.**
- **Focusing on just calories leads to the unintended consequence of encouraging consumers to choose lower calorie, but less nutrient-rich foods.**
- **Consumers strongly believe that the NFP should list food group-specific micronutrients, and they prefer call outs for calories *and* nutrients on the front of the package (PDP).**
- **Prominence of calories alone is not motivating enough for behavior change, nor is changing the food label alone.**

Results from this research indicate that *if* FDA moves forward with changes to the food label, changes should emphasize *both* calories and key nutrient contributions from each food group to reflect current recommendations in the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid*, as well as to deliver on the FDA OWG goal to outline an action plan ... *to help consumers lead healthier lives through better nutrition*. In addition, it is clear that a unified educational system **that harmonizes the food label with the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid* is the best approach from a consumer perspective, as well as from a public health perspective.**

NCBA Label Research: Key Findings

Although consumers rate the existing label favorably, when shown alternative labels consumers overwhelmingly support the idea of changing the label to provide more information. Given the epidemic of obesity in the United States, and in light of new 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid* recommendations which are designed to help Americans choose diets that will meet nutrient requirements, promote health, support active lives and reduce risks of chronic disease, not just prevent weight gain and reduce obesity, the existing NFP label may not be enough to help consumers build healthful diets.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* state, “**Many Americans consume more calories than they need without meeting recommended intakes for a number of nutrients. This circumstance means that most people need to choose meals and snacks that are high in nutrients but low to moderate in energy content; that is, meeting nutrient recommendations must go hand in hand with keeping calories under control**”².

In today’s world, the food label has to work harder to achieve the goals of government nutrition guidance. And, when consumers are presented with alternatives to the current NFP, there is a clear preference that suggests the need to include enhanced information on the label regarding nutrient contributions to help educate consumers on *getting more nutrition from their calories*³.

Health conscious consumers and those who read labels regularly feel that the current label meets their needs:

- Nearly all consumers surveyed felt that the current NFP meets their needs. Forty one percent (41%) said the current NFP met their needs very well and 53% said it met their needs moderately well.
- Over half of consumers (55%) do not find any of the information on the current NFP confusing or unclear.

However, more information, such as a list of all nutrients for which a food is a good source on the NFP helps consumers choose healthful foods:

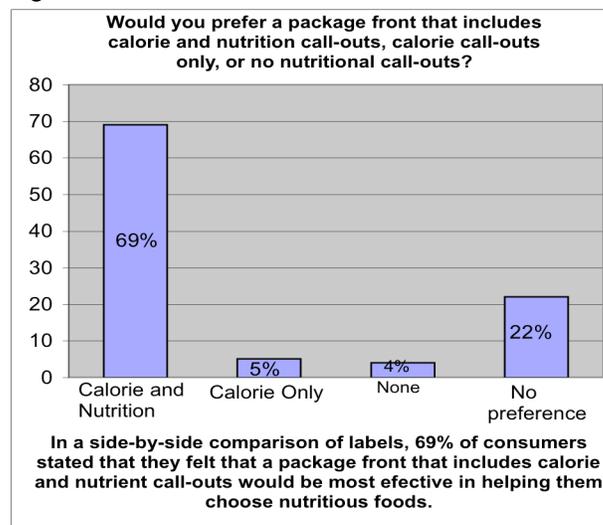
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of consumers held a strong belief that foods that are major contributors of certain vitamins and minerals should show this information on the NFP. Only a few consumers believe that the NFP should *not* show vitamins and minerals for which the food is a good source (3%).
- Consumers say they are more likely to use the label with all food group-specific nutrients listed including those with 0% value when compared to one that does not show 0% values (38% to 18%).

Consumers strongly believe that the NFP should list food group-specific micronutrients, and they prefer call outs for calories *and* nutrients on the front of the package (PDP).

When shown three food package fronts, one with no nutritional call outs, one with calorie call-out only and one with calorie and key nutrient call-outs, consumers prefer *both* calorie and nutrition information for *all four* product categories tested:

- Sixty-nine percent (69%) of consumers say a package front that includes calorie and nutrition call-outs would be most effective in getting them to choose nutritious foods. (See Figure 1).

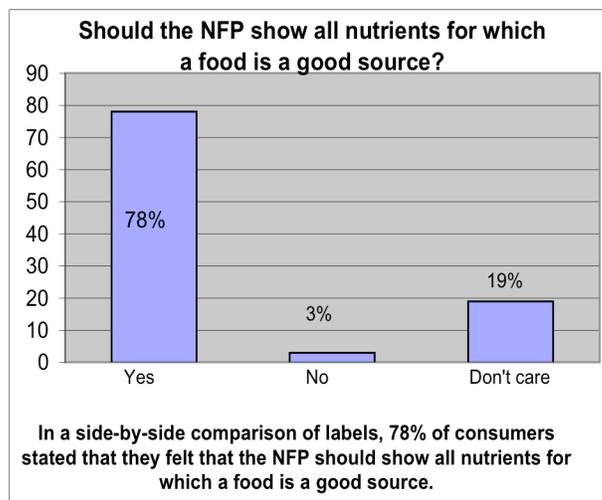
Figure 1



Shugoll Research, June 2005

- In fact, more than half (57%) of consumers strongly feel that the expanded NFP (listing food group-specific micronutrients) combined with the calorie and key nutrient call-outs on the front of the package is the most effective in helping consumers purchase nutritious foods.
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of consumers held a strong belief that foods that are major contributors of certain vitamins and minerals, such as zinc, calcium, B-vitamins, folate and phosphorus, should show this information on the NFP. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2



Shugoll Research, June 2005

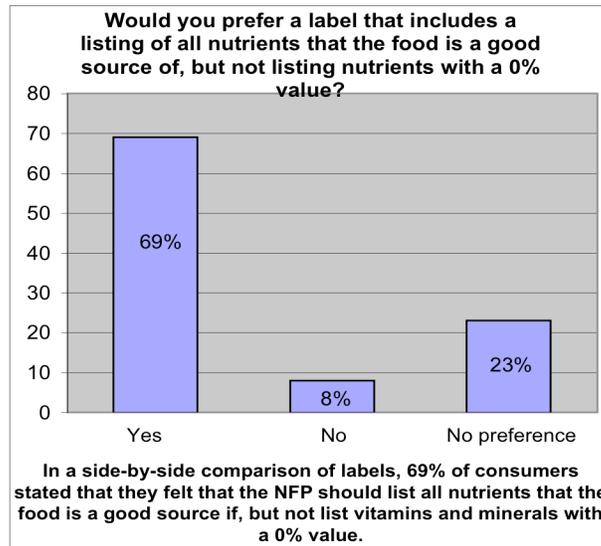
When consumers were given the option between two labels – one listing the current mandatory micronutrients – vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron – compared with a sample NFP with an expanded food group-specific micronutrient listing, they confirm a strong preference to see all vitamins and minerals for which a food is a major contributor. This is consistent for each food category tested:

- Seventy-three percent (73%) *prefer the expanded listing of nutrients* that shows all key nutrients for that food.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of consumers said they would *be most likely to use* a label that provided a more complete listing of micronutrients to choose nutritious foods.

Research shows that creating labels that give consumers a more complete nutrition story is preferred and will help consumers make nutrient-rich food choices. Consumers generally want food labels that are easy to use and that easily fit into their lives⁴. And, consumers look to the NFP to tell them what nutrients are being provided by different food categories. Improving labels to make consumers more aware of the nutrient content of products is valuable because it would make them think twice about how they think about food and beverage choices⁴.

A NFP that contains a 0% listing (as may be seen if a food is not a significant source of the current mandatory micronutrients, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron) is potentially misleading for consumers if they interpret 0% as meaning the food is not nutritious. Consumers express preference for a NFP with an expanded nutrient list but no 0% values versus the current NFP that may list 0% values. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3



Shugoll Research, June 2005

While NCBA recognizes that foods can voluntarily list key micronutrients on the food labels now, our research shows that consumers are clearly looking for information about nutrients *and* calories together to help them make healthful food choices. **Should FDA decide to make changes to the food label in any way, food group-specific micronutrients *must* be included alongside any change giving prominence to calories. Calories cannot stand alone as an effective tool for helping consumers build healthful diets.**

Focusing on just calories leads to the unintended consequence of encouraging consumers to choose lower calorie but less nutrient-rich foods.

Greater attention to calories alone leads to less nutrient-rich food choices. Calling more attention to calories alone does not educate consumers to understand that some moderate calorie foods can be nutritious, and even more so than lower calorie options. In fact, consumers are more likely to believe that low-calorie/low nutrient foods are healthier than moderate-calorie foods that are nutrient-rich. Asked to rank food labels that represented the mostly healthy and nutritious food, consumers named two low calorie foods equally despite their clear difference in nutrient content.

- Consumers equally ranked non-fat milk (33%) and carbonated beverage (33%) as “most healthy”.
- Based on NFP alone, a number of consumers choose low calorie/low nutrient foods based on NFP alone (28%).

The impact of putting greater emphasis on calories alone could mirror the unintended consequences which resulted from the ‘lowfat’ era in which focus on fat grams or calories from fat alone lead consumers to choose foods based solely on fat content without regard to total calories per serving. Choosing foods based solely on one component such as calories without regard to the essential nutrients that are provided by each food will lead to increased consumption of low calorie but nutrient poor foods, and potentially exacerbate nutrient inadequacies that already exist in the American diet.

Prominence of calories alone is not motivating enough for behavior change, nor is changing the food label alone.

Three front of package labeling options were tested: one with no nutritional information highlighted, one with calorie call-out only and one with calorie and key nutrient call-outs.

- Over 75 % of consumers feel that the addition of calorie information only to the front of food packages is not helpful or they don't have a preference.
- About one-fifth (21%) feel that highlighting the calorie count only on the package front is not useful to them.

At best, half of consumer regularly read the NFP though they do not read them regularly for all product categories tested or use all the information available on the NFP. To a large degree, those who could benefit most from improving their diet are least likely to regularly read nutrition labels. Thus, changing the nutrition information on the food package is unlikely to change consumer purchase or consumption behavior unless accompanied by an increase in education and usage of nutrition information. Despite the fact that half of consumers indicate from a list that they read NFP to help ensure that they and their family eat healthy meals, fewer report reading labels regularly.

- Just over one-fifth (22%) of consumers report always reading NFP for any food group.
- Less than half (19-48%, depending on food category) report reading NFP all or most of the time.

Food labels, in essence, need to work harder to fulfill recommendations to *choose nutrient-dense foods within and among all food groups to get more nutrition from calories they select*^{2,3}. Tools at point of purchase, such as the food label, have the potential to help consumers make the best food choices possible. But, these nutrition education tools need to link calories and nutrients together rather than address them in isolation. Additionally, food labels need to tell consumers what nutrients the food *does* contribute versus what it *does not* contribute to help build more healthful diets. For instance, the current label regulations require listing 4 micronutrients – vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron – based on nutrients of concern at the time the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA) was finalized. If a food does not contain one or all of those 4 nutrients, then telling consumers there is 0% vitamin C in a serving of milk or lean beef, for instance, does not inform them that there are 9 other essential nutrients provided in quantities deemed excellent or good sources. If consumers are unaware of what nutrients a food or food group contributes, they will be unable to effectively build a healthful diets. As mentioned, our research suggests that consumers (73%) strongly prefer the NFP to include an expanded list of food group-specific micronutrients for all food categories tested (grains, vegetables, meat, dairy).

Should FDA undertake changes to the food label, NCBA believes it is imperative that FDA change the basis for its mandatory disclosure of nutrients on the NFP to be consistent with today's nutrition guidance to include listing micronutrients based on food group contributions. In this manner, consumers will be able to identify and choose more nutrient-rich foods within and among all food groups. A food group-specific micronutrient listing will also address the list of *new* nutrients of concern based on the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines* since foods high in these nutrients will be required to list them automatically in the NFP.

Nutrition Facts Label must reflect 2005 *Dietary Guidelines* and *MyPyramid* recommendations for a unified educational system

Public health nutritionists are concerned that we have become an overfed, yet undernourished nation⁵ and that low energy-dense foods are eroding the nutrient density of the American diet. The reported 300 calorie/day increase in energy intakes in the period 1985-2000 was largely accounted for by less nutrient dense grains, added sugars and fats, not by milk and other dairy, lean proteins, vegetables and fruit and whole grains^{6,7,8}.

For the first time, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid* food guide have been updated to be complementary tools based on the same scientific criteria. The food label is a tool that

consumers use on a daily basis to help make purchasing decisions. The label must harmonize with the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid* by providing information on the entire nutrient package that foods provide – not just calories. This approach will give consumers the tools necessary to better implement nutrition guidance, and fulfill the goals as outlined in the FDA OWG charge to *help consumers lead healthier lives through better nutrition*⁹ by providing complete information for consumers to make wise food choices.

A basic premise of the *Dietary Guidelines* is that food guidance should recommend diets that will provide all the nutrients needed for growth and health. Consumers need to understand, be able to identify and choose nutrient-rich foods from all five food groups to meet government guidance to *get the most nutrition from calories*³. Since each food group is a major contributor of at least one nutrient, and provides substantial contributions for many other nutrients¹⁰, NCBA strongly encourages FDA to consider changing the labels so that micronutrient listings on the NFP reflect nutrients on the basis of food group contributions. By providing information on the NFP about nutrients specific to each food group, the label broadens the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines* and *MyPyramid* into a useful tool at point of purchase, thus ensuring a unified education system.

Listing food group-specific nutrients gives consumers the information they need to build overall healthful diets. For example, the meat, poultry, fish, eggs and nuts (MPFEN) group is a major contributor of niacin, vitamin B6, zinc and protein, and a substantial contributor of vitamin E, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B12, phosphorus, magnesium iron, copper, potassium, and linoleic acid¹⁰. Labels for foods within this food group that provide a listing for these nutrient contributions will allow consumers to choose the most nutrient-rich choices within and among the food group. A serving of lean beef, for example, provides an excellent source of protein (50%), zinc (39%), B12 (37%), and phosphorus (20%), and a good source of niacin (18%), vitamin B6 (16%), iron (14%) and riboflavin (12%). Consumers would benefit with the knowledge that they are getting significant sources of 8 of 14 key nutrients from lean beef within the MPFEN food group. Similarly, salmon provides a good source of thiamin (11%), vitamin B6 (10%), and potassium (10%) and excellent source of B12 (49%), niacin (36%), and phosphorus (25%). Similarly, they would benefit from the knowledge that chicken breast contributes 4 out of 14 key MPFEN food group nutrients including protein (53%), B6 (26%), niacin (58%), phosphorus (19%). In the vegetable food group, labels within this food group would provide a listing for vitamin A, vitamin B6, potassium, copper, and fiber, of which vegetables are a major contributor, and thiamin, folate, vitamin C and various other nutrients of which vegetables are a significant contributor. A serving of spinach provides an excellent source of vitamin A (120%), and a good source of folate (17%) and vitamin C (10%) and fiber (12%).

Given current *Dietary Guideline* recommendations to get the most nutrition from calories, and from a public health standpoint, providing micronutrient listings on labels that vary depending on the food group would provide the most useful information for consumers to build healthful diets.

America’s cattle producers believe consumers need to be fully informed about the amount of calories *and* important nutrients each food group provides.

In conclusion, America’s cattle producers believe consumers need to be fully informed about the amount of calories *and* important nutrients each food group provides. Lean proteins contribute valuable nutrients to the diet, including protein, zinc, iron, vitamin B₁₂, selenium, phosphorus, niacin, vitamin B₆ and riboflavin that are currently not reflected in food labeling. Label comparisons for nutrient-rich foods within and among each food group is difficult without providing food group-

specific micronutrient information on the NFP. For this reason, the beef industry believes on-pack NFPs among all five food groups should include prominence to essential nutrients that are relevant to each of the five food group to help consumers identify the key nutrients each food group contributes in addition to calories.

Food group-specific nutrient information on the NFP will allow consumers to determine how a serving of different foods within each of the five food groups fits into their overall diet. This approach will also help consumers meet goals as outlined in the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPyramid* for consumers to *consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within and among the basic food groups*². Should the agency undertake changes to the NFP that includes more prominence to calories, FDA *must* also include food group-specific micronutrients on food packages to be consistent with recommendations from other government organization recommendations to choose *the most nutrient-dense foods within and among the food groups*² and *get the most nutrition from calories*³.

As we further analyze and collect additional data, we continue to provide comments in response to this Federal Register notice. We are also available to provide a briefing for FDA on the results of this research.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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