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The new EU nutrition labelling: Barriers and opportunities that food business operators perceived in their business practices and for consumers food purchases

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Although consumers express a growing expectation in finding clear, credible and easy to understand label, presented in food products, studies confirm that European consumers have difficulties in understanding and use nutritional labelling in the format currently existing in the European Union. To overcome this situation, the European Union issued a new food information regulation on the provision of information on food consumers to be in force from 13 December 2014.

The proposal took into account the need to simplify and consolidate the plethora of legal acts on labelling, to accommodate what consumers have shown to need, as well as improving nutrition information in order to help them make informed and healthier choices.

The aim of this study was to understand in depth the largest Portuguese manufactures and retailers' nutrition labelling practices in the light of the acceptance of the new food information regulation. A qualitative study has been developed and an interview guide was designed through food business operators, taking into account barriers and opportunities for food business operators and consumers face the new nutrition labels.

Although the majority of the ten respondents had a positive opinion on a unique regulation, they also addressed the minimum character size, that acts as a barrier to marketing actions, because with this limitation they do not have space to provide voluntary information on the: product (e.g. claims, "kosher"), production method (e.g. organic), package (e.g. PET recycling), and corporate social commitments. Industry operators also worry about the obligation of the country of origin labelling inclusion.

Most participants identify a number of benefits for the consumer like: allergen communication in non-pre-packed food, improved clarity of labels, mandatory nutrition declaration and, the harmonisation of rules. However, food operators considered the presence of confusing information, like changes in nutrition declaration (e.g. replacement of "sodium" to "salt") and origin labelling in processed foods.

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