

NUTRITION LABELING

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## INTRODUCTION

In the mid and late 1960's there were indications that the diets of many Americans were nutritionally inadequate (Breeling, 1971). Several interrelated factors focused attention on the need for an improved system of communicating nutrition education and information. These factors included the consumerism movement, widespread concern for the nutritional status of the U.S. population, consumers' difficulty in identifying the nutritional quality of an increasing number of processed and formulated foods, and increasing consumers' skepticism of the nutritional quality of the total food supply (Bauman, 1971; and Johnson, 1974). In addition, greater affluence, desire for leisure time and a greater number of working women have contributed to changing eating patterns. The traditional three meals a day food plan has been altered to increased snacking, mini-meals and meals eaten away from home. Although the modern supermarket today contains thousands of food items, the consumer does not know the nutritive value of many of the foods (Call, 1972).

The Ten-State Nutrition Survey of 1968-70 (Schaefer, 1969; and U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1972) and the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health of 1969 (Final Report, 1970) concluded that the diets consumed by many Americans, especially those of low socio-economic and minority groups, are inadequate in several

important nutrients. These nutrients include iron, vitamins A and C, thiamin, riboflavin and protein (Anon., 1971; and Hegsted, 1973). The White House Conference strongly recommended that steps be taken to assure the nutritive quality of processed foods and that food labels be used to help consumers select a nutritious diet.

As a consequence, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), because of its authority to enforce food laws, assumed leadership in the development of what now is known as nutrition labeling. This report gives an overview of this new development.

#### PURPOSE OF NUTRITION LABELING

According to an official of the FDA, nutrition labeling regulations were developed to provide maximum assistance to both consumers and manufacturers and to provide a mechanism by which more information can be provided to consumers (Johnson, 1974). The regulations also were designed "to assure that the nutritional quality of the foods for sale remain as high as possible and to stimulate manufacturers to put more effort into nutrition."

Nutrition labeling of food has several specific purposes (Babcock and Murphy, 1973; Bauman, 1971; and Hegsted, 1973):