

## Health claims for foods in focus

European Regulation (EC) No. 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims made on foods came into force in early 2007. This means that, after many years of discussion, it is now possible to use health claims on foods in all European Union (EU) countries. The main reasons for EU regulation in this area are consumer protection and protection of data behind innovative food products. Free movement of products without hindrance from differences in national legislation is another important aspect. The Regulation has been awaited for many years, by the industry as well as by consumer organizations. In the Regulation, provision is made even for the most controversial type of claims in relation to medicinal products legislation, i.e. disease risk reduction claims.

Before the Regulation, the different European countries had quite variable practices and perceptions in this area. Sweden was the first country to allow certain health claims within a Code of Practice introduced in 1990 (before entry into the EU). Voluntary codes were introduced in the Netherlands in 1998 and in the UK in 2000/2001. Application of these codes has provided experience in handling claims and the evaluation of scientific substantiation of claims, whereas other member countries have maintained a strict prohibition of health claims on foods with reference to the medicinal products legislation. In this issue the Regulation is described, followed by a paper reviewing the achievements of the Swedish Code.

The Regulation states that scientific substantiation should be the main aspect taken into account for the use of nutrition and health claims, and it is the task of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to judge whether the scientific substantiation is sufficient. Consumer relevance is not explicitly mentioned in the Regulation. However, the fact that claims must be “truthful, clear, reliable and useful for the consumer in choosing a healthy diet” could be interpreted as also including the relevance aspect. Many claims, e.g. on the metabolic functions of vitamins, may be perfectly true scientifically, but irrelevant or even misleading to consumers in countries with sufficient intake. Maximizing the

list of allowed claims would also imply the risk that claims important to promote a healthy balanced diet are buried in a large number of less relevant claims.

The first action in implementing the new regulation is the establishment of a list of allowed claims regarding growth, development and functions of the body, including psychological/behavioural functions and functions related to weight control/hunger/satiety, according to Article 13.1. In Sweden the National Food Administration has invited SNF Swedish Nutrition Foundation, the co-ordinating body of the Swedish Code, and Svensk egenvärd, the food supplement producers’ organization, to suggest Article 13.1 claims for foods and food supplements, respectively. The third paper in this issue presents a list of health claims proposed by SNF, established according to the principles of the Swedish Code, with emphasis on consumer relevance from a Swedish perspective.

### *Carl Linnaeus anniversary*

The great and best known Swedish natural scientist all time, Carl Linnaeus (Carl von Linné), was born in 1707. The tercentenary is celebrated all over Sweden and internationally. Linnaeus was very interested in the relation between food and health and he wrote several treatises on this subject. These formed the basis for a recent conference arranged by the Uppsala Food and Nutrition Centre: *Culina mutata – the changing kitchen*. One of the plenary presentations at this conference by Leena Räsänen was entitled “Of all foods bread is the most noble”. As a contribution to the Linnaeus tercentenary celebrations *Scandinavian Journal of Food and Nutrition* is pleased to publish this presentation, illustrating perceptions on food and health at that time. Evidently, health claims for foods were already being made 300 years ago!

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