

New food labels dished up to keep Europe healthy

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A groundbreaking deal on compulsory new food labels Wednesday is set to give Europeans clear information on the nutritional and energy content of products, as well as country of origin.

After years of debate, the European parliament approved legislation to harmonize compulsory data, including use-by dates and nutritional information key in the battle to fight mounting obesity.

Within five years, labels on [supermarket shelves](#) will have to spell out [energy content](#) along with fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt levels -- all expressed per 100g or 100 ml.

With a minimum font size of 1.2 mm, the labels will be easy to read, and 14 recognised allergens will be highlighted in bold in all lists of ingredients.

Existing country-of-origin regulations, now required for beef, honey, olive oil and fresh fruit and vegetables, will be extended to fresh meat from pigs, sheep, goat and poultry.

Fake foods -- such as cheese lookalikes actually made from vegetable oils and water and hardly any milk -- will also be clearly labelled, with the cheese tagged "made of vegetable oil".

Likewise meat or fish consisting of meat or fish parts will be labelled "formed meat" or "formed fish" in fonts 75 percent the size of the brand

name.

"If a yoghurt has a picture of fruit on it, it will have to contain fruit and not merely aromas or colouring substances," said rapporteur Renate Sommer, a German conservative MEP.

In three years the European Commission will look at whether to add "trans fats" associated with high cholesterol and heart disease and add listed ingredients to alcohols.

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