

Packaging and labelling

Legal requirements that you have to follow as a food business.

Legal Requirements for providing food information to consumers

Other than in Northern Ireland (NI), any references to European Union (EU) Regulations in this guidance should be read as meaning retained EU law. You can access retained EU law via the HM Government [EU Exit web archive](#). This should be read alongside the relevant EU Exit legislation that was made to ensure retained EU law operates correctly in a United Kingdom (UK) context. EU Exit legislation can be accessed on [legislation.gov.uk](#). In NI, EU food law will continue to apply, as listed in the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#). Retained EU law will not apply in these circumstances.

This page highlights the requirements of Regulation No. 1169/2011, the Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation, and associated legal standards for labelling and composition of food products such as bottled water, milk, fish and meat. The Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers brings together EU rules on general food labelling and nutrition labelling into one piece of legislation.

The [retained version of Regulation 1169/2011](#) on the provision of food information to consumers applies to food businesses in Great Britain (GB). Whereas, EU food law, including [Regulation \(EU\) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers](#), applies in NI.

Labelling of prepacked food

All prepacked food requires a food label that displays certain mandatory information. All food is subject to general food labelling requirements and any labelling provided must be accurate and not misleading.

Certain foods are controlled by [product specific regulations](#) and they include:

- bread and flour
- cocoa and chocolate products
- soluble coffee
- milk products
- honey
- fruit juices and nectars
- infant formula
- jams and marmalade
- meat products - sausages, burgers and pies
- fish
- natural mineral waters
- spreadable fats
- sugars
- irradiated food
- foods containing genetic modification (GM)

FSA Explains: Compositional standards

What must be included

The following information must appear by law on food labels and packaging:

Name of the food

The name of the food must be clearly stated on the packaging and not be misleading.

If there is a name prescribed in law this must be used.

In the absence of a legal name, a customary name can be used. This might be a name that has become commonly understood by consumers and established over time such as 'BLT' for a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich.

If there is no customary name or it is not used, a descriptive name of the food must be provided. This must be sufficiently descriptive to inform the consumer of the true nature of the food and to enable it to be distinguished from products with which it might otherwise be confused. Most products will fall into this category and require a descriptive name.

If the food has been processed in some way, the process must be included in the title, for example 'smoked bacon', 'salted peanuts' or 'dried fruit'.

A processed food is any food that has been altered in some way during preparation.

List of ingredients

If your food product has two or more ingredients (including water and [additives](#)), you must list them all under the heading 'Ingredients' or a suitable heading which includes the word 'ingredients'.

Ingredients must be listed in order of weight, with the main ingredient first according to the amounts that were used to make the food.

Some foods are exempt from the need to display an ingredient list, for example: fresh fruit and vegetables, carbonated water and foods consisting of a single ingredient etc.

Allergen information

Where a food product contains any of the [14 allergens](#), required to be declared by law, as ingredients, these allergens must be listed and emphasised within the ingredients list.

You must emphasise allergens on the label using a different font, style, background colour or by bolding the text. This enables consumers to understand more about the ingredients in packaged foods and are helpful for people with food allergies and intolerances who need to avoid certain foods.

We provide [free online allergen training](#) for businesses.

Quantitative declaration of ingredients (QUID)

The [QUID](#) tells a consumer the percentage of particular ingredients contained in a food product. This is required where the ingredient or category of ingredients concerned:

(a) appears in the name of the food or is usually associated with that name by the consumer;

(b) is emphasised on the labelling in words, pictures or graphics; or

(c) is essential to characterise a food and to distinguish it from products with which it might be confused because of its name or appearance.

The indication of quantity of an ingredient or category of ingredients must:

- be displayed as a percentage, which corresponds to the quantity of the ingredient or ingredients at the time of its/their use; and
- appear either in or immediately next to the name of the food or in the list of ingredients in connection with the ingredient or category of ingredients in question.

Net quantity

All packaged foods above 5g or 5ml must show the net quantity on the label to comply with the Food Information Regulations.

Foods that are packaged in liquid (or an ice glaze) must show the drained net weight.

The net quantity declaration is not mandatory in the case of foods:

(a) which are subject to considerable losses in their volume or mass and which are sold by number or weighed in the presence of the purchaser;

(b) the net quantity of which is less than 5 g or 5 ml, unless these are herbs or spices;

(c) normally sold by number, provided that the number of items can clearly be seen and easily counted from the outside or, if not, is indicated on the labelling.

Storage conditions and date labelling

Food labels must be marked with either a 'best before' or 'use by' date so that it is clear how long foods can be kept and how to store them.

Further information can be found in the [guide on date marking](#) on the Waste & Resources Action Plan (WRAP) website.

Name and address of manufacturer

Food businesses must include a business name and address on the packaging or food label. This must be either:

- the name of the business whose name the food is marketed under; or
- the address of the business that has imported the food

Food products sold in NI must include a NI or EU address for the food business. If the food business is not in NI or EU, they must include the address of the importer, based in NI or the EU.

Food businesses can continue to use an EU, GB or NI address for the FBO on food products sold in GB until 30 September 2022.

From 1 January 2024 (extended from 1 October 2022), food products sold in GB must include a UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man address for the food business. If the food business is not in GB, they must include the address of the importer, based in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

The address provided needs to be a physical address where your business can be contacted by mail. You can't use an e-mail address or phone number. Providing an address gives consumers the opportunity to contact the manufacturer if they have a complaint about the product or if they want to know more about it.

Country of origin or place of provenance

In accordance with the FIC Regulations, the indication of the country of origin or place of provenance of a food shall be mandatory where failure to indicate this might mislead the consumer as to the true country of origin or place of provenance of the food. Consumers might be misled without this information, for example a Melton Mowbray Pork pie which was made in Italy.

Under the FIC Regulations there are specific origin rules which must be adhered to, including the Country of Origin for Primary Ingredients and Country of Origin for Certain Meats.

Find out [when you must label your meat, fish or seafood product with its country of origin](#).

In NI, EU Country of Origin rules, as applied by the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP), are applicable for food placed on the NI market. Where EU Law requires an indication of a Member State in respect to country of origin, food businesses must ensure that where food has originated in Northern Ireland, such indications should be in the form "UK(NI)" or "United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)".

Preparation instructions

Instructions on how to prepare and cook the food appropriately, including for heating in a microwave oven, must be given on the label if they are needed. If the food must be heated, the temperature of the oven and the cooking time will usually be stated.

Nutritional declaration

The mandatory nutrition declaration must be clearly presented in a specific format and give values for energy and six nutrients. The values must be given in the units (including both kJ and kcal for energy) per 100g/ml, and the nutrition declaration must meet the minimum font size requirements.

Further information is available at [Nutrition Labelling](#).

Additional labelling requirements

There are [additional labelling requirements](#) for certain food and drink products. You must tell the consumer if your products contain:

- sweeteners or sugars
- aspartame and colourings
- liquorice
- caffeine
- polyols

FSA Explains: Food labels

How to display mandatory information on packaging and labels

A minimum font size applies to mandatory information which you must print using a font with a minimum x-height of 1.2mm.

If the largest surface area of packaging is less than 80cm squared, you can use a minimum x-height of 0.9mm.

Mandatory details must be indicated with words and numbers. They can also be shown using pictograms and symbols.

Mandatory food information must:

- be easy to see
- be clearly legible and be difficult to remove, where appropriate
- not be in any way hidden, obscured, detracted from or interrupted by any other written or pictorial matter
- should not require consumers to open the product to access the information

Food labelling - non-prepacked foods

Non-prepacked food is any food presented to the final consumer or mass caterer that does not fall within the definition of 'prepacked food'.

Non-prepacked foods include:

- foods sold loose in retail outlets
- foods which are not sold prepacked, such as meals served in a restaurant and food from a takeaway
- food packed on the sale's premises at the consumers' request, such as a sandwich prepared in front of the consumer

Labelling requirements

For non-prepacked food, the name of the food, presence of any of the [14 allergens](#), and a QUID declaration (for products containing meat), must be provided to consumers. This can be done:

- (a) on a label attached to the food, or
- (b) on a notice, ticket or label that is readily discernible by an intending purchaser at the place where the intending purchaser chooses that food.

In the case of irradiated food, one of the following statements must appear near the name of the food:

- 'irradiated' or
- 'treated with ionising radiation'

Currently, food businesses are not required by law to provide a full ingredients list. The requirement is to provide information about the use of allergenic ingredients in a food. If a food business chooses not to provide this information upfront in a written format, (for example allergen information on the menu), they must use clear signposting to direct the consumer to where this information can be found, such as asking a member of staff. In such situations, a statement must be included on food menus, chalkboards, food order tickets or food labels.

[Prepacked for Direct Sale \(PPDS\) foods](#) need to have a label with a full ingredients list with allergenic ingredients emphasised within it.

Packaging wrappers (Vacuum packing)

If you [vacuum pack \(VP\) or modified atmosphere pack \(MAP\)](#) food as part of your business then you must:

- use material that will not be a source of contamination for wrapping and packaging
- store wrapping materials so they are not at risk of contamination
- wrap and package the food in a way that avoids contamination of products
- make sure that any containers are clean and not damaged, particularly if you use cans or glass jars
- be able to keep the wrapping or packaging material clean

Food authenticity

Food authenticity is when food matches its description. Labelling is regulated to protect consumers who should have the correct information to make confident and informed food choices based on diet, allergies, personal taste or cost.

Mislabelled food deceives the consumer and creates unfair competition with manufacturers or traders. Everyone has the right to know that the food they have bought matches the description given on the label. Part of our role is to help prevent mislabelling or misleading descriptions of foods.

The description of food refers to the information given about its:

- name
- ingredient
- origin
- processing

If you think that a food product is not authentic, please see information on [food crime](#).

Falsely describing, advertising or presenting food is an offence and there are many laws that help protect consumers against dishonest labelling and misleading descriptions.

The legislation

Legislation in England

[The Food Information Regulations 2014 in England](#) enables local authorities to enforce the European Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation 1169/2011.

Defra provides summary [guidance for England](#).

Legislation in Northern Ireland

[The Food Information Regulations 2014 in Northern Ireland](#) enables district councils in Northern Ireland to enforce the European Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation 1169/2011.

Legislation in Wales

[The Food Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2014 in Wales](#) enables local authorities to enforce the European Food Information to Consumers (FIC) Regulation 1169/2011.