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Voluntary Public

Date: 3/10/2017

GAIN Report Number: 17006

Canada

Post: Ottawa

Canada Consults on Food Labelling Modernization

Report Categories:

Policy and Program Announcements

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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Report Highlights:

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is in its third phase of consultations on key proposals to modernize the food labeling system. Among the proposals are the elimination of standard container sizes for certain products, food company information requirements on labels, and new requirements for test market authorization. Stakeholders should submit their comments on line by the new extended deadline of March 14th, 2017.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) objective of the Food Labeling Modernization initiative is to develop a more modern food labeling system that responds to current and future challenges by:

- improving access to information about food labeling to help consumers make informed decisions about the food they buy
- protecting consumers, while enhancing opportunities for industry to be competitive
- responding more effectively to consumer, industry and government needs related to food labelling

Consultations initially started in 2013 to identify and prioritize issues relating to food labeling modernization, and continued in 2015 when CFIA sought options that could lead to recommendations for modernizing the Canadian food labeling system. The most recent report on these consultation was summarized by CFIA in their "[what we heard report](#)".

Currently, the CFIA moved into its third phase of consultations on key proposals to modernize the food labeling system. Stakeholders should submit their comments on line by March 14, 2017 at the following address: [Discussion Paper and Online Questionnaire - Phase III](#)

These consultations will focus on two “streams”. The first stream is about modernized regulations which are meant to improve mandatory labeling requirements with respect to:

- Standard container sizes
- Food company information
- Test market authorization
- Percent ingredient declaration
- Origin of imported foods
- Date marking
- Legibility and placement of information
- Ingredient list improvements – class names
- Food compositional standards and modified common name
- Streamlining and removing unnecessary regulations

In the context of this first stream, one of the proposals is related to the elimination of standard container sizes for some products identified during the previous consultation phase from 2015. The list is available on page 32 of the [consultation document](#). Discussions around this proposal would also allow interested stakeholders to bring to CFIA's attention other products than those currently on the list and that could benefit from the removal of the container size restrictions.

Similarly, stakeholders could also use the framework offered under the first stream to raise concerns related to food compositional standards and standardized common names.

The proposal related to food company information involves enhancing dealer information and bringing consistency to requirements by:

- Requiring the name of the **CFIA license holder** on all imported food, or food intended for interprovincial trade (provincially traded food products currently require a dealer name)
- In addition to the company name, city and province, or city and country, include at least one of

the following: a telephone number, email address, website or other means of communication between the license holder/dealer and consumer.

If this proposal were adopted, U.S. manufacturers would need dedicated packaging for each Canadian importer.

Another of the proposals in the first stream involves test market authorization (TMA). Under the proposal, CFIA would re-focus the use of TMAs on test marketing of a food that is new, and seek support to define a **new food** as either:

- a. A food **new to Canada** (the food has never been imported or sold inter-provincially in Canada by **anyone**) or
- b. A food **new only to that company** (the food has not been imported or sold interprovincially by the applicant even if other companies are selling the same type of food)

If this proposal were adopted, a company who has previously sold a product in Canada could no longer use TMAs to test the market for product line extensions, such as new flavors.

The second stream will focus on establishing a new approach for truthful and not misleading food labeling that realigns the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. Under the proposed new approach, the industry will bear the main responsibility to ensure compliance with Canada's regulations, including ensuring that labels are not false or misleading to consumers, while for their part the consumers will be encouraged to take an active role in seeking information about a company's claim by contacting the company directly, or making complaints directly to companies should they have concerns.

The government's role will focus on adopting a risk-based enforcement of rules related to food safety and fraud, developing guidance, investigating falsely labeled products, and targeting inspection resources on areas of highest risk, including economically motivated adulteration of food and fraud.