

LABELS, SWEETIE, LABELS!

Do you know what's in your food? Think about your breakfast this morning. Your cereal, eggs, bacon, milk... What exactly are you putting into your body? Self-confessed "bacon crusader" Richard Bosman, who makes quality cured meats, visited the supermarket recently and picked up a packet of commercial bacon. He says in his blog (<http://richardbosman.wordpress.com>) that he was "unpleasantly surprised to read the following ingredient declaration: 'Pork, salt, maltodextrin, dextrose, acidity regulator, phosphates, antioxidant, sodium erythorbate, flavour enhancers, spice extracts, colourant, sodium nitrate, potassium nitrate, natural smoke flavourant.' I don't even know what some of these ingredients are used for and I *make* bacon!"

But consumers are finally being offered greater insights into their food products with the introduction of a food labelling law known as the R146. It forbids ambiguous and misleading information and regulates both the labelling and advertising of food products, decreeing that all claims made must be clearly substantiated.

For example, manufacturers will no longer be able to make claims such as "low fat", "high in fibre" or "sugar-free" without providing a clear table outlining the exact nutritional information. The labels also need to break down the percentages of each ingredient and include its source.

The sell-by and use-by dates are now a legal requirement, as is the stipulation of allergens and, if the goods are imported, the country of origin must be provided. If a manufacturer makes a legal nutritional claim, the product will need to be analysed on a three-yearly basis at an accredited lab. Words such as "fresh", "pure", "healthy" and "natural" require stringent criteria to be met, so they can no longer be abused.

Says Dr Alan Tomlinson, Health Products Association Chair: "We're especially pleased to note a provision for consumer-friendly allergen labelling, as well as a requirement to specify previously frozen food on the label. The new regulations prescribe a uniform format for nutritional information that will assist the consumer to compare nutritional information between different products."

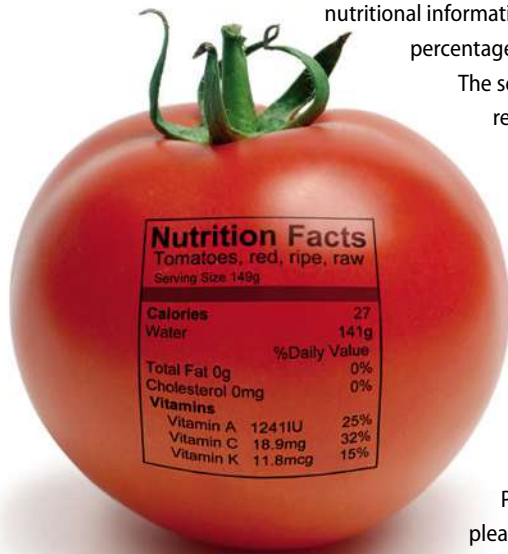
However, there was some consternation that the link between certain foods and illnesses such as cancer and osteoporosis hadn't been addressed in the regulations. "Increasingly, consumers are looking for information on functional foods that may reduce the risk of disease or promote optimal health. The absence of this component in the new laws deprives the consumer of valuable health-enhancing information," says Tomlinson.

We're being offered an opportunity to demand better foodstuffs now that we know what they contain. The question is: do we care?

To report non-compliance, contact the National Consumer Commission on tel: 011 355 8000, 0800 007 081, 012 940 4500, 0860 266 786, email: ncc@thedti.gov.za or visit: www.nccsa.org.za

To find out more about the Food Labelling Law, visit: www.doh.gov.za

– FIONA DAVERN



WOMAN OF THE WORLD

FASHION FORWARD

Adiat Disu (25), founder and Director of Africa Fashion Week New York (AFWNY), is committed to taking the continent's fashion industry to global proportions. Born in Nigeria, she now lives in New York

With her passion for Africa and trenchant insights into fashion, Disu's propelled awareness of the continent's designers and artisans since AFWNY's inception in 2010. The event has spurred dialogue among investors and buyers and generated much revenue for the sector, reaching some 8,5 million viewers globally.

"I want the world to see that Europe and the USA aren't the only markets that should be synonymous with luxury. Africa should be too. With a unique aesthetic, exceptional cultural influences and a wealth of raw talent and skill, our continent has the capacity to dominate. All we needed was a platform," she says.

She adds that the African fashion sector requires apt branding and a level of consistency to thrive. "It begins with the realisation that we aren't a charity case, but can compete with the likes of Donna Karan and Yves Saint Laurent."

She plans to further the show's reach by branching into the fashion capitals of Milan, London, Tokyo and Paris, as well as develop a showroom that will act as a centralised, exclusive hub of African designs.

– NAZLEY OMAR