

SAFE launches SugarControl nutrition claim label

By Sara Lewis

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Campaign group Safe Food Advocacy Europe (SAFE) has launched a trademarked SugarControl label that companies can use to promote the low or no sugar content of their products in line with EU claims legislation.

Launched at a European Parliament event “The excessive consumption of sugar: a health issue,” hosted by Irish Socialist MEP Nessa Childers on 28 June, the nutrition label, which can be used in all 24 EU official languages, complies with the 2006 nutrition and health claims regulation (NHCR – 1924/2006). To bear one of the four SugarControl labels – and different nutrition claims, products will have to be tested by an independent laboratory certified to ISO 17025. The four labels and conditions for use are:

- **Low sugars:** the product contains no more than 5 grams of sugars per 100g for solids and no more than 2.5g of sugars per 100 millilitres for the liquids;
- **Sugars-free:** the product does not contain more than 0.5g of sugars per 100g or 100ml;
- **No Added Sugars:** the product does not contain added mono- or disaccharides or any other food used for its sweetening properties. If the sugars are naturally present in the food, the following indication must also appear on the label: “Contains naturally occurring sugars”;
- **Reduced sugars:** the sugar content in the product is reduced by a minimum of 30% compared to a similar product. The total amount of sugar does not exceed 12g per 100g. The energy quantity of the product bearing the label must be equal to or less than the amount of energy in a similar product.

However, the labels cannot be given to products containing aspartame, SAFE Secretary General Floriana Cimmarusti told the conference.

The label is being rolled out as part of SAFE’s wider Sugar Project, which aims to bring added sugar intake down to levels recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) namely less than 10% of energy intake, with ideally under 5% since that would bring additional health benefits. The WHO favours the term “free sugars” for added sugars as opposed to naturally occurring sugar for example in fruit.

Practically, this would mean adults consuming no more than 50g or 12 teaspoons of sugar a day and children a maximum 32g or eight teaspoons. In reality, Cimmarusti revealed that in Belgium adults average 100g or 25 teaspoons a day and children 80g or 20 teaspoons a day.

Cimmarusti explained that the Sugar Project has five main objectives starting with informing consumers about the health risks associated with over-consumption of sugar, through videos and educational flyers.

Then with the support from the Ministry of Education of the Wallonia Brussels Federation, SAFE trains children and teenagers in Belgian schools to adopt healthier diets with lower daily sugar intake through its campaign “Désucrez-vous! Du sucre oui, mais pas trop!” (Unsweeten-yourself! Sugar yes, but not too much!)

Another key goal is to persuade the agri-food industry to lower the quantity of sugar in their products by developing this SugarControl label for those who do comply.

Then for consumers, the project involves developing a smartphone application with information about the amount of free sugars contained in food products.

As a final point, the project aims to improve the 2011 food information to consumers regulation (FIC – 1169/2011) when it comes to sugar information on food packaging. Currently, the FIC only requires the nutrition declaration to state the total amount of sugars and does not distinguish between added (or free) and naturally occurring sugars.

The head of the Commission’s Food information and composition, food waste unit Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, who was also speaking at the conference noted that the question about whether the label should distinguish between added and natural sugars “is still open” at EU level.