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Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

New Allergen Labeling

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Report Highlights:

On September 29, 2003, the Council and the European Parliament adopted an important amendment to the EU's general food labeling directive. Listing all sub-ingredients of compound ingredients on the label will become mandatory thus enabling consumers to identify any allergenic ingredients. The new rules will also extend to alcoholic beverages.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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NEW ALLERGEN LABELING

On September 29, 2003, the Council and the European Parliament adopted an important amendment to the EU's general food labeling directive (Directive 2000/13/EC). Listing all sub-ingredients of compound ingredients on the label will become mandatory thus enabling consumers to identify any allergenic ingredients. A list of ingredients liable to cause allergies or intolerances is provided in the amendment to the labeling directive. The new rules will also extend to alcoholic beverages.

The new rules abolish the current "25% rule", under which it is not necessary to list all the components of compound ingredients if they make up less than 25% of the final food product. For example, the label on a food product containing less than 25% mayonnaise, did not have to list all the ingredients used in the mayonnaise. Because mayonnaise may contain allergenic ingredients such as eggs and mustard, all the ingredients will have to be declared under the new rules.

Some labeling exceptions will no longer be accepted for allergens. Peanut oil can no longer be labeled as vegetable oil because peanuts are included in the list of potential allergenic ingredients. Similarly, the source of a natural flavor such as a nut will have to be indicated, while it can currently be labeled as "natural flavor". Alcoholic beverages were previously exempt from ingredient labeling. Under the new rules, all ingredients that are on the allergen list must be declared which means that sulphite present in wines will have to be indicated.

List of potential allergenic ingredients to be labeled:

- Cereals containing gluten and products thereof
- Crustaceans and products thereof
- Eggs and products thereof
- Fish and products thereof
- Peanuts and products thereof
- Soybeans and products thereof
- Milk and dairy products (including lactose)
- Nuts and nut products
- Celery and products thereof
- Mustard and products thereof
- Sesame seeds and products thereof
- Sulphur dioxide and sulphites at concentrations of more than 10 mg/kg or 10 mg/liter

The new directive will be published in the EU's Official Journal in late 2003. Member states then have one year to transpose the directive into national laws, after which a one-year transition period is granted to manufacturers in order to modify the labeling of their products. Consumers should see the concrete results of these new labeling provisions in 2005.

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