



Food Nutrition Labeling Compliance Guide



Are Your Food Nutrition Labels Updated? If Not, Microbac Laboratory is Here to Help.

The Nutrition Facts label is one of the most familiar features on food packaging and a cornerstone of consumer transparency. Initially introduced by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1994, the label recently underwent an overhaul to reflect advances in nutrition science and the connection between diet and chronic diseases, including obesity and heart disease.

The recent update brought the most significant changes in over 25 years. Large manufacturers were required to implement the new format by January 1, 2020, while smaller producers had until January 1, 2021, to do so. Those changes, now standard across nearly all packaged foods, improved the clarity, accuracy, and relevance of nutrition information for consumers.

While the compliance deadlines have long passed, maintaining accurate, defensible, and compliant labels remains vital.

It is estimated that poor diet is responsible for over \$50 billion in annual health care costs, attributable to cardiometabolic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, in the U.S.¹

Understanding Current Nutritional Facts Label Requirements

Recent Major Modifications

Following years of input from scientific organizations, nutrition experts, health professionals, industry stakeholders, and the public, the FDA finalized new requirements for the Nutrition Facts label. The rules became **mandatory for all manufacturers by 2021**, marking the first major change to U.S. food packaging in more than two decades. Key revisions include:²

- **SERVINGS:** Redundant declarations are now in larger and/or bolder font. Serving sizes have been updated to better reflect the amounts people typically eat and drink (e.g., the serving size for ice cream was previously 1/2 cup and is now 2/3 cup). There are also new requirements for certain-sized packages, such as those between two and three servings or larger than a single serving but able to be consumed in one or multiple sittings.
- **CALORIES:** Now displayed in bold, large print to improve readability at first glance.
- **FATS:** While still requiring “Total Fat,” “Saturated Fat,” and “Trans Fat” on the label, “Calories from Fat” has been removed because research indicates that the type of fat is more significant than the amount.
- **ADDED SUGARS:** “Added Sugars” in grams and as a percent Daily Value (%DV) is now required on the label. Added sugars include those added during food processing (such as sucrose or dextrose), those packaged as sweeteners (such as table sugar), sugars from syrups and honey, and sugars from concentrated fruit or vegetable juices. Scientific data shows that it is difficult to meet nutrient needs while staying within calorie limits if individuals consume more than 10% of their total daily calories from added sugar.



- **NUTRIENTS:** Vitamin D and potassium are now required on the label because Americans often do not consume the recommended amounts. Vitamins A and C are no longer required since deficiencies of these vitamins are now rare. They can, however, be voluntarily included by food manufacturers, along with other vitamins and minerals. The actual amount (in milligrams or micrograms), in addition to the %DV, must be listed for vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium. The Daily Values for nutrients have also been updated based on newer scientific evidence. The Daily Values are reference amounts of nutrients to consume or not exceed each day and are used to calculate the percentage of Daily Value (%DV).
- **FOOTNOTE:** The footnote at the bottom of the Nutrition Facts label has changed to better explain the meaning of %DV. The %DV helps individuals understand the nutrition information in the context of an overall diet.

Minor Adjustments

Since the implementation of the updated Nutrition Facts label, the FDA has introduced several refinements to enhance clarity, modernize claims, and maintain consistency across product categories. While these updates do not alter the label's core structure, they reflect the agency's ongoing commitment to transparent, science-based communication. Key adjustments include:

- **PLANT-BASED AND NON-DAIRY PRODUCTS:** Expanded guidance for products using traditional dairy terms, such as "milk" or "yogurt," to describe non-dairy alternatives. Labels must now provide clear context about nutrient content and composition to avoid misleading comparisons.³
- **"HEALTHY" NUTRIENT CONTENT CLAIMS:** Adjusted criteria for when products can display the term "healthy," aligning it more closely with updated dietary guidelines and nutrient standards.⁴
- **ORGANIC AND LABEL CLAIM CLARITY:** Minor revisions to claim language and verification standards to reduce ambiguity around organic, natural, and sustainability statements.⁵

Together, these refinements strengthen the connection between labeling, consumer understanding, and regulatory consistency. For manufacturers, staying informed and verifying label claims through accredited laboratory testing remains a vital part of compliance and brand transparency.

Looking Ahead: Future Labeling Considerations

The FDA and public health community continue to evaluate ways to make nutrition information more accessible and meaningful. Several proposals and guidance documents under consideration could shape food labeling over the next few years. Discussions and preliminary proposals have focused on:

- **FRONT-OF-PACKAGE (FOP) NUTRITION LABELING:** A proposed rule that would add a small “Nutrition Info” box to the front of most food packages, showing key nutrients such as saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars in an at-a-glance format. Timelines and requirements are still being reviewed.⁶
- **UPDATED “HEALTHY” SYMBOL:** With the updated “healthy” definition in place, FDA continues to explore a standardized symbol that manufacturers could use on packages to indicate a product meets the claim, supported by prior notices and research.⁷
- **PLANT-BASED AND ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN LABELING:** Draft guidance continues to evolve around the naming and labeling of plant-based alternatives to animal-derived foods, including meat, eggs, seafood, and dairy. Final guidance is expected to clarify how these products should disclose source ingredients and nutrient comparisons.⁸
- **ALLERGEN LABELING AND CLAIM VERIFICATION:** Ongoing policy discussions aim to refine allergen labeling requirements and improve claim substantiation processes, ensuring consistency and safety across product categories.⁹

“Regulations will continue to evolve, but validated testing and accurate data will always be the foundation of truthful and compliant product labels.”

SAMUEL MARTIN, MT (ASCP) | DIRECTOR OF SALES

While these initiatives are not yet enforceable, they point to a future where label transparency and clarity will remain central to FDA policy. Food manufacturers that maintain accurate data and verified nutrient testing will be better prepared to adapt when these updates move from discussion to implementation.

Just the Facts

The modern, redesigned Nutrition Facts label has become one of the most effective and recognizable tools in public health communication. What began as a regulatory update has proven to be a valuable resource for both consumers and manufacturers, offering clarity, consistency, and confidence in the information displayed on packaged foods.

A Clearer, More Functional Design

Since its introduction, the Nutrition Facts label has been frequently criticized for being too complicated for consumers to properly understand and use. Compared to the older label, the redesign provides a stronger visual hierarchy and better alignment with dietary behavior. Calories and servings now dominate the top of the panel, while added sugars appear directly beneath carbohydrates for faster recognition. Its standardized structure and high-contrast design simplify complex nutritional information into a format that people can understand and act on (Figure 1).

According to the FDA, these design and content changes have significantly improved public understanding of key dietary components, allowing shoppers to make faster, smarter decisions at the shelf.¹⁰



FIGURE 1

How Consumers Use the Nutrition Facts Panel

A report conducted by the NPD Group, a leading global information company, found that nearly 90% of American consumers read food packaging labels and rely on them as an important source of information, especially to support healthier eating lifestyles.¹¹

Sugars (57%) and calories (45%), both of which are updated in the new labeling regulations, topped the most looked at items by consumers on the nutrition label, according to NPD's Health Aspirations and Behavioral Tracking Service. Rounding out the top four consumer items were sodium (38%) and protein (33%). The NPD report recorded palpable interest in total fat and trans fat among a fair number of consumers. Nine percent of surveyed consumers reported that they look for potassium content, a new addition to the label because of its importance in a healthy diet.

Today's consumers are not just reading the Nutrition Facts panel, they are interpreting it as a reflection of a brand's credibility. A recent NSF International survey found that 83% of Americans read food labels before purchasing, and 64% say they now pay closer attention to labels than five years ago, citing clarity and standardization as key drivers of trust.¹²

The shift in consumer behavior underscores how nutrition transparency directly affects purchasing decisions. Brands that clearly communicate nutrient content, serving size, and ingredient integrity are increasingly favored by health-conscious consumers seeking authenticity and accountability.



A Proven Tool for Transparency

The food industry's investment in redesigning and updating labels continues to pay off.

Early FDA projections estimated that the new label could cost the industry about \$2 billion to implement but yield as much as \$20–30 billion in long-term health and economic benefits.¹³

Several years later, its impact extends beyond compliance:

- Fewer labeling errors and misbranding citations
- Increased consumer confidence in package information
- Faster regulatory review and fewer reformulation-related reprints

“Today’s savvy consumers rely on accurate labels to make decisions about what they will and will not feed their families. Getting the information right is key to building both consumer confidence and loyalty.”

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Why Compliance Still Matters: The Hidden Cost of Getting It Wrong

The FDA compliance deadline may have passed, but the risks of inaccurate or outdated labels remain significant. An incorrect Nutrition Facts panel can trigger product detention, recall, or consumer litigation. Recent data shows that label-related recalls cost the U.S. food industry approximately \$1.92 billion in direct expenses, with nearly half of all recalls linked to labeling errors.¹⁴

The financial toll is only part of the problem.

Consumer trust can be much harder to recover. In a recent sentiment survey, 35% of respondents stated that they would stop using a brand involved in a recall for several months, and 17% indicated that they would never return to that brand.¹⁵

False or unsupported nutrient claims can also lead to regulatory action. Labels that state “high in protein” or “excellent source of fiber” must be backed by verified laboratory data. The same requirement applies to allergen declarations and front-of-pack nutrient claims.

Compliance is not only a legal expectation but a key element of risk management. A single inaccurate label can disrupt months of production, undermine consumer confidence, and erase years of brand equity.



Labeling Checklist for Food Manufacturers (2026 Edition)

Food producers can simplify compliance by approaching labeling as a structured process rather than an occasional task.

✔ **MANAGE AND ROTATE LABEL INVENTORY:**

Monitor packaging supplies and phase out outdated labels when formulations or regulations change. Retiring non-compliant stock reduces financial waste and prevents accidental use of obsolete packaging.

✔ **VERIFY YOUR FORMULATION:**

Confirm that every ingredient and formulation aligns with FDA nutrient reporting requirements. Conduct laboratory or hybrid analysis for accurate results.

✔ **CONFIRM ALLERGEN AND CLAIM SUPPORT:**

Test to verify statements such as “good source of protein” or “contains vitamin D.” Use laboratory results as documentation for nutrient and allergen accuracy. Microbac supports this verification process through accredited allergen and nutrient testing.

✔ **AUDIT FOR FORMAT AND READABILITY:**

The Nutrition Facts layout takes precedence over graphic design. Labels that obscure or reorder required elements risk being deemed misleading. Verify that serving sizes, RACCs, and nutrient hierarchy match FDA specifications.

✔ **UPDATE FOR PRODUCT OR SUPPLIER CHANGES:**

Even small ingredient or sourcing adjustments can alter nutrient values. Re-evaluate and, if necessary, re-test affected products to maintain accurate and compliant data.

✔ **STORE AND MANAGE DATA SECURELY:**

Maintain organized records of nutrient profiles, Certificates of Analysis, and prior label versions. Proper documentation streamlines audits, supports traceability, and simplifies future reformulations.

✔ **REVIEW, THEN PRINT:**

Before printing, have labels reviewed by an internal compliance lead or accredited laboratory. FDA does not pre-approve labels, so independent verification is the best safeguard against misbranding or recall risk.

Partnering with Microbac

Microbac Laboratories, the nation's largest family-owned third-party laboratory network, has supported the food industry for over 50 years. We operate over 30 ISO 17025–accredited laboratories across the United States, providing accurate nutrient data for regulatory use. Every analysis follows AOAC-approved methodologies, producing results recognized by both federal and international authorities.

Our food testing specialists work closely with companies of all sizes—from emerging brands to national producers—to interpret nutrient data, clarify regulatory updates, and guide reformulation decisions. Each partnership is built on precision, responsiveness, and clear communication.

“It really helps – especially for a smaller company – to have a partner you can rely on from a testing perspective as well as an experience and knowledge perspective. Having an accredited laboratory on your team that can guide you through the interpretation of the data and the CFR is a real benefit.”

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Comprehensive Labeling Support

Microbac offers complete nutritional analysis, allergen verification, and claim substantiation testing. Our team helps food manufacturers develop FDA-compliant Nutrition Facts panels and can also assist with label design and review. Our expanding network now supports U.S., Canadian, and Mexican labeling requirements, giving food companies a single partner for cross-border compliance.


“Microbac offers nutritional testing packages for almost every segment of the food and beverage industry. We can also offer customized packages to meet specific customer needs. Our Certificate of Analysis (COA) gives companies of any size peace of mind knowing that their testing was performed in accordance with the highest standards.”

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Stay Current, Stay Confident

The modern Nutrition Facts label has proven to be an economic and ethical success story for the food industry. Beyond helping consumers make better dietary decisions, it has rewarded manufacturers who view compliance as an investment in brand integrity. In a marketplace where transparency drives loyalty, the companies that get labeling right—and keep it right—stand out as the true leaders in consumer trust.



Microbac Laboratories stays at the forefront of FDA updates, international labeling standards, and emerging nutrition science to help clients anticipate change rather than react to it. Whether you're launching a new product, reformulating an existing one, or expanding into new markets, Microbac delivers precise data and regulatory expertise for fully compliant Nutrition Facts labeling.

Get in touch to learn more about our complete nutrition testing and labeling services.

[GET IN TOUCH](#)

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