

Food Standards and Labelling

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Introduction

Every consumer expects the food he eats to be of a high quality standard especially with respect to its safety. This has resulted in food standards being formulated by the government with an established food control system to ensure that these standards are adhered to. Such standards are mandatory in Sri Lanka under the Food Act. There are also voluntary food standards such as those formulated by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution. These always comply with the Food Act and its regulations, and thus there is no conflict in food standards. In addition there are international food standards, company standards and standards of other countries which our exporters have to adhere to. Food labelling and advertising are also governed by a regulation. This article elaborates on the food standards in operation in Sri Lanka and gives details of the laws governing food labelling.

Food standards in Sri Lanka

Food Standards under the Food Act No: 26 of 1980



Food is regulated in Sri Lanka by the Food Act. No: 26 of 1980 (amended in 1990) under the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition. The food standards issued as regulations gazetted under this Act are mandatory, i.e. they have to be complied with by anyone manufacturing, importing, distributing or selling food in Sri Lanka. These standards, covering many products and processes are revised by the Food Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, and gazetted regularly when they become law.

Food standards under the Food Act are used by food inspectors, food and drugs inspectors and public health inspectors throughout the island to implement the food control system in the country in order to ensure the safety of food. Failure to comply with these requirements prompts legal action by the government. These Authorized Officers coming mainly under the purview of the Provincial Administration carry out inspections of food processing factories, food retail outlets and even hotels and restaurants to ensure compliance with the law. Analysis of samples of food seized by them is done either

by the laboratories of the Government Analyst's Department, the Medical Research Institute, or the laboratories under the Health Ministry located in Kaluthara and Anuradhapura. The Colombo and Kandy Municipalities have their own laboratories.

Food standards under SLS System

Food standards under the Sri Lanka Standards Institution are mostly voluntary standards. They are for food products and processes, and specify the officially recognized levels of quality, safety,

Food standards and labelling

composition, packaging and labeling regulations that are appropriate for the Sri Lankan market. These national standard specifications for food products are drawn up by Working Groups appointed by SLSI consisting of senior technical persons from government organizations with expertise in the particular field of the standard being formulated, and finalized with a consensus of the relevant food processors. Draft standards are available for public comment prior to approval by the Sectoral Committee on Agriculture and Food Products, and finally endorsed by the Council of the Sri Lanka Standards Institution.



SLS food standards as formulated above, form the basis for awarding the SLS certification for products, and for the compulsory import inspection scheme implemented by SLSI. The SLS certification has been found to be the most effective way of implementing food standards by SLSI. Food manufacturers should satisfy the SLSI that the food product's design, production, safety, hygienic conditions and quality control are such that it conforms to the Sri Lanka Standards consistently. SLSI monitors the manufacture of SLS marked products continuously.

Food standards

Mandatory standards under the Food Act

Table I gives details of the present mandatory food standards effective in Sri Lanka under the Food Act.

Recently gazetted food standards of interest are the Food (Labelling & Advertising) Regulations 2005, the regulations and standards governing bottled drinking water, the standards for iodized salt, and the control of import, labeling and sale of genetically modified foods.

Bottled drinking water

Registration of bottled drinking water was made mandatory to ensure that the consumer gets safe water when he buys a bottle of drinking water. The

manufacturer of bottled drinking water should obtain a certificate of registration from the Chief Food Authority. The premises where the water is bottled should also be registered. Recommendation for granting this certificate is at present given by the SLSI in the form of a report. The bottle should display the registration number issued by the Chief Food Authority on the label. Most registered bottled drinking water also have the SLS mark.

Iodisation of salt

Lack of iodine in the diet had led to increased incidence of goiter in the country. Though there were standards for iodized salt earlier, the limits for iodine were reduced in these new standards based on local scientific research. According to regulations only iodized salt can be sold in the country. Salt (sodium chloride) should be iodized with potassium iodate, potassium iodide or calcium iodate to give a final product with less than 6% moisture content, more than 97% sodium chloride content and an iodine content of 15 – 30 ppm. Instructions to store the product away from sunlight and heat, and to use it without washing should also be given on the label.

New food standards under Food Act

Table 2 lists the draft standards under the Food Act which are due to be gazetted in the future. Some of these products have mandatory standards at present, which will be ineffective when the new standards are gazetted.

Table 1: Present Food Standards under the Food Act No: 26 of 1980

Gazette No:	Date	Regulations	Topic
560/13	02/06/1989	Food Regulations –1988	Food hygiene
615/11	19/06/1990	Food (Preservatives) Regulations	Preservatives
673/18	22/11/1990	Food (Standards) Regulations 1989	Baking powder, Sugar confectioneries Cereals, pulses, flours & cereal foods, Fats & oils, Spices, condiments & seasonings
673/8	01/08/1991	Food (Standards) Regulations 1989	Milk & milk products
788/7	14/10/1993	Food (Labeling & Miscellaneous) Regulations Part II & Part III.	Part II. Antioxidants & food colours Part III. General prohibition & regulation of sales
823/16	16/06/1994	Food (Standards) Regulations 1989	Butter, ghee, cheese, yoghurt, curd, ice cream, malted food (malted milk powder)
834/8	31/08/1994	Food (Bread Standard) Regulations 1994	Bread
1175/13	27/02/2001	Food (Prohibition of Potassium Bromate in flour) Regulation 2000	Flour: prohibition of Potassium bromate
1323/1	12/01/2004	Food (Sweeteners) Regulations 2003	Sweeteners
1376/9	19/01/2005	Food (Labeling & Advertising) Regulations 2005	Labeling, advertising
1405/3	11/08/2005	Food (Iodization of Salts) Regulation 2005	Iodisation of salt
1420/5	21/11/2005	Food (Irradiation) Regulations 2005	Irradiation of food
1420/4	21/11/2005	Food (Bottled or Packaged Water) Regulations 2005	Bottled natural mineral water & bottled drinking water
1456/22	03/08/2006	Food (Control of Import, Labelling & Sale of Genetically Modified Foods) Regulations 2006	GM foods
1472/19	23/11/2006	Food (Colouring Substances) Regulations 2006	Food colours
1503/8	27/06/2007	Food (Vinegar Standards) Regulations 2007	Vinegar

Table 2: List of Draft Food Regulations

- Cereal, pulses, legumes & derived products
- Fats & oils
- Fish & fish products
- Fruits, vegetables & products
- Meat & meat products
- Milk & milk products
- Spices, condiments & seasonings
- Sugar & sugar products
- Tea, coffee, cocoa & products
- Infant formula milk in powder form
- Contaminants in food
- Food additives (General)
- Preservatives
- Antioxidants
- Emulsifying & stabilizing agents
- Flavouring substances and flavour enhancers
- Food hygiene (General)
- Food (packaging materials and articles)
- Food (registration of premises)
- Preparation & distribution of cooked food

Standards under SLS Certification

SLSI operates voluntary standards and systems certification and compulsory import inspection schemes. Sri Lanka Standards (commonly known as SLS standards) are generally voluntary standards. They are adopted by food processing companies which permit the products to bear the SLS logo to assure consumers that the food product is manufactured under an effective products quality assurance system to meet the given SLS Standard. Purchasers of SLS marked food products are given the assurance by an independent body (SLSI) that the food item is produced under a system of supervision and control for continuous compliance with the relevant Sri Lanka Standards. Presently there are 125 standards for food products, 27 standards for primary products, 14 for food additives, and 43 for methods of test/analysis. Twenty five codes of practice for hygienic manufacture of specific food products provide useful information for carrying

out the specific processing industry.

SLSI also offers voluntary systems certification for food industries based on GHP (Good Hygienic Practice), GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice), HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) system, and more recently, the international ISO 22000 Food Safety Management System. Certification for ISO 22000 by SLSI is accredited by a world recognized organization, RvA, Netherlands. Certain Sri Lanka food standards (see Table 3) have been made mandatory by the Consumer Affairs Authority. These food products should have the SLS mark to be in the market. Inspections are carried out by the Consumer Affairs Authority officers. SLSI also implements a compulsory import inspection scheme for 33 food items (see Table 4). SLS officers sample and test imports of these products for compliance with SLS specifications before release by Sri Lanka Customs into the local market.

Global food standards’ role in Sri Lanka

The FAO / WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission has published international standards for most food products, and codes of practice for food processing industries. These standards (commonly known as Codex standards), finalized after intensive international consultation and concurrence, form the main quality reference for standards formulation in Sri Lanka by both the Food Advisory Committee and the Sri Lanka Standards Institution.

Codex standards are updated regularly based on world trends and developments in technology. Harmonizing our local food standards with these global standards has

Table 3: Mandatory SLS Standards for Food Products

- **Beverages. non-alcoholic:** Fruit cordials, fruit cordial concentrates, ready to serve fruit drinks, synthetic/artificial cordials
- **Dairy products :** Butter, condensed milk, milk powder
- **Fats & Oils :** Coconut oil, corn oil, edible soybean oil, groundnut (peanut) oil, margarine, palm kernel oil, palm oil, palm olein, palm stearin, sesame oil, sunflower seed oil
- **Fish and fish products :** Canned fish
- **Flour and bakery products :** Biscuits
- **Fruit and vegetable products :** Jams, jellies, marmalades & preserves, tomato sauce/ketchup
- **Miscellaneous product :** Brown sugar, chilli sauce

Table 4: Food Products - SLS Compulsory Import Inspection Scheme

Skimmed milk powder	Palm kernel oil	Jams, jellies, marmalades and preserves
Full cream milk powder	Corn oil	Fruit squashes, fruit syrups and fruit cordials
Condensed milk	Sesame oil	Fruit concentrates
Butter	Margarine	Ready-to-serve fruit drink
Soya bean oil	Canned fish	Tomato sauce
Groundnut oil(peanut oil)	Canned fish curry	Chillie sauce
Palm oil	Brown sugar	Ice cream
Palm olein	Noodles	Milk added drinks
Palm stearin	Rice noodles	Bottled water
Sunflower seed oil	Sweet biscuits	Natural mineral water
Coconut oil	Rusks	Synthetic/artificial cordials

now become important with the development of global trade, and the signing of many bilateral trade agreements which need common standards.

In food standard formulation in Sri Lanka by both the Ministry of Health and the Sri Lankan Standards Institution, the standards adopted by India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand etc. play an important role as reference material, because these countries have food products and problems that are common to Sri Lanka. In addition, many of our imported food products come from the region.

Food labelling

The Food (Labelling & Advertising) Regulations 2005 is applicable to all prepackaged food offered for sale or advertised for sale in Sri Lanka. A label on a prepackaged food gives a declaration of the food in the package. The regulations specify, in terms of content, language, letter size and format, the information that the label should carry. Readers who wish to design a label for their food product should read the gazette (No: 1376/9 of 19th January, 2005) carefully as the information provided in this article is only a brief summary of the main features.

The **main panel** of a food package (the part of the label most likely to be displayed for detail sale) should contain the following three items:

1. The common name in any two of the three languages, in bold type letters, clearly and conspicuously

2. The Brand / Trade name which should not mislead the consumer and could be in any one of the three languages.

3. The net contents in international units i.e g/kg or ml/l.

The **common name** is the name by which the food is commonly identified. The size of the letters for the common name should not be less than one third the size of letters used for the **brand name**, with a minimum height of 3 mm.

The brand name is specific for the company. Other information which should be conspicuously printed on the label in bold type letters not less than 1.5 cm (not necessarily on the main panel) include the following:

1. Permitted food additives by name or INS number
2. Instructions for storage and / or use, if any
3. Name and address of manufacturer
4. Name and address of packer or distributor in Sri Lanka
5. Batch number or code number or decipherable code marking.
6. Date of expiry (in any two of the three languages)
7. Date of manufacture
8. Date of manufacture and date of repacking (for bulk imports and repacks)
9. Complete list of ingredients in descending order of their proportions by common name.
10. Country of origin (for imported food)
11. Any other stipulated declarations.

The said gazette also specifies the height of letters for different declarations depending on the area of the main panel (the height increasing with the area of the main panel), the formats for the dates of manufacture and expiry (DD/MM/YY or YY/MM/DD) to ensure that

consumers are not misled by using only two digits for the year, e.g. 06/05/07 could be the 6th of May 2007 or the 7th of May 2006.

Some of the other major features of these regulations are that the consumer should not be misled by the label, by words or by pictures to assume that the food is connected to another product, and there should be no recommendation by a medical practitioner etc. or of any health claims. Promotions related to energy, protein, cholesterol etc. could be only made under specified



conditions. The use of the words “Artificial”, “Natural” and “Pure” on a label are clearly defined in these regulations.

Labelling GM foods

Under the recently gazetted regulations, the Chief Food Authority’s (CFA) approval is necessary to import or manufacture any genetically modified organisms (GMO) as food for human consumption, any food containing GMO’s, any food produced from GMO’s or containing ingredients from GMO’s. Only such approved GM products can be transported, distributed, stored or sold in Sri Lanka. Approval is given by the CFA if the food is not injurious to the consumer’s health and does not differ nutritionally to the disadvantage of the consumer from



the usual food as proven by a comprehensive report on studies done. The other information required include, the modification done on DNA and protein, the process, the countries where the product is sold and the manner of presentation and labeling. Approved GM products could be marketed with suitable labeling. Products proven to have less than 0.5% of genetically modified ingredients are exempt from labeling.

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“Pure” and “Natural” in food labelling

No label relating to any article of food shall, in the description of such article of food bear the word “pure” or any other word implying that it is pure, unless such article is of such character, value, composition and merit as prescribed by regulations made under the Act, and contains no additives of any kind.

No label shall, in the description of any food product, bear the word “natural” thereon unless, such food or food product consists of unmixed, unadulterated or unprocessed product with no additives. It may however be subjected to pasteurization, chilling or freezing; and

Such food or product is produced from biological material as distinct from synthetic material.