

The Road to Harmonised Allergen Labelling: New Recommendations to Codex for Allergen Labelling

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Abstract

Food allergies are a recognised public health concern. Clear allergen labelling is essential to help allergic consumers and their caregivers identify safe food options. But national authorities establish and enforce their own allergen-labelling strategies, meaning that requirements vary across the world. This may add to consumers' confusion regarding how to interpret allergen information. Therefore, to improve consumer protection, and reduce trade barriers, the global harmonisation of food allergen labelling and control will be valuable.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) plays a pivotal role in establishing standard approaches to food safety, including allergen labelling and control. It has been decades since Codex's global guidance on food allergen labelling was published. Since then, great strides have been made, deepening our understanding of food allergies and allergens. In 2020, the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) and the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) tasked the FAO and WHO with reviewing this guideline. Consequently, an ad hoc FAO/WHO Expert Panel was invited to three rounds of consultations.

In the first phase of the consultations, priority allergens were reviewed and validated through risk assessment. For the second phase, the task was to review and determine priority allergen threshold levels in foods. The third and final phase was to review and recommend conditions for precautionary allergen labelling.

Once the recommendations have been accepted by Codex and incorporated into the official standards, CAC member countries (including South Africa) will be able to adopt them or incorporate them into their allergen-labelling framework.

Increased momentum on the risk assessment and risk management of food allergens suggests we may be on the cusp of real progress on the road to globally harmonised allergen labelling.

The presentation unpacks and summarises the key recommendations of the ad hoc FAO/WHO Expert Panel; examines how they could contribute to the desired outcome of global harmonisation of allergen labelling; appraises how the current South African regulations measure up; and looks to the road that still lies ahead.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY: KAYLA STEYN

Kayla is a qualified Food Scientist and part of the FACTS (Food and Allergy Consulting and Testing Services) team, where she works in the Allergen Management Division. As a technical consultant in the field of food allergens, she assists clients with risk assessment of food allergens and allergen management at food production facilities. She has experience in helping clients develop, validate and verify allergen management plans, including assisting with choosing appropriate rapid kit systems. Kayla's involvement in allergen management has fuelled her commitment to helping clients develop robust systems to manage food safety risks. She believes in sharing evidence-based information and practical solutions to overcome obstacles in the food industry.