

AmCham Germany Executive Summary: **Nutrition Labeling**

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According to Plattform Ernährung und Bewegung (peb), 10-15 percent of children are already overweight by the time they begin school. Poor dietary habits and insufficient physical activity have been shown to lead to a decrease in motor skills and can cause physical and emotional problems. It is estimated that diet-related illnesses, including obesity, account for ca. €70 billion in health care costs annually. With ample exercise and a balanced diet, these problems can largely be avoided.

Prevention is the key to overcoming this social problem. Informing consumers through targeted, transparent nutrition information has become the goal of many food and beverage companies as well as consumer organizations. The pros and cons of different depictions of nutrition information on food packaging are currently being discussed on local, national and international levels. Governments, companies and consumers alike are seeking an easy-to-understand labeling system to assist in the decision making process and encourage healthy nutrition choices.

In one system, noted for its “traffic light” structure, foods receive green, yellow or red dots which indicate the amount of calories, fat, sugar or salt that can be found in 100g of the product. The color-coding is intended to help consumers determine which foods are healthy at a glance, but 100g rarely qualifies as a serving size. AmCham Germany believes this system is misleading and will discourage consumers from buying products that may actually be healthy when consumed in one serving, but that have received a red dot for having what is deemed to be excessive fat or salt in 100g. Therefore, under the traffic light system, it will be difficult for consumers to compare products and make informed nutrition decisions. This system was implemented in England with mixed results and both companies and consumers are diverging from this method.

A popular alternative, which has already been widely and voluntarily implemented throughout Europe, is the Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) system. This neutral system, similar to that which is used in the United States and recommended by the Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the European Union (CIAA), is based on serving size. Nutritional values of one portion of the product are presented as a percentage of the recommended daily value, simplifying product comparisons for the consumer. In both the GDA and the traffic light systems, symbols or icons on the front of the package offer nutrition information at a glance with more details listed on the back.

AmCham Germany supports its members and the work of organizations such as Plattform Ernährung und Bewegung in informing the public about leading healthy lifestyles and making informed decisions regarding nutrition and physical activity to prevent obesity.