

LETTERS

ADVISORY FOOD LABELS

Food allergy information and deriving action levels for use

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We agree that consumers with food allergies need clear information about the risks of allergens being accidentally present in food,¹ but changes to existing practices must be based on robust scientific evidence.

The Food Standards Agency has been working with a range of experts to review the current evidence, including studies such as EuroPrevall, to ascertain whether sufficient data are available to derive workable action levels for allergens.²⁻⁴

It is accepted that zero risk is not possible, so a tolerable level of risk needs to be agreed.⁵ Any agreed action level must be practical for the food industry and provide choice and certainty for people with allergy.

VITAL is a scheme used in Australia and New Zealand that has set limits at which allergy advisory labelling is applied, but the levels in this scheme are under review. Outcomes from the International Life Sciences Institute's food allergy task force are expected in the next 12 months, and these will provide the food industry with the information needed to make consistent decisions on allergen advisory labelling.

The authors make the claim that advisory labelling may not be accurate,¹ but decisions have to take account of the risk across

the whole batch, rather than from individual items when applying such labelling. A Food Standards Agency survey will investigate the prevalence of allergen advisory labelling, and the presence of allergens in foods with and without such labelling.

Competing interests: None declared.

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