NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 0569/2019 by H.R. (German) on better food labelling

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner would like the information about the contents of food packaging to appear in a larger font. This would require a legal obligation, as many producers use such a small font for the information that older people in particular find it difficult to read.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 5 November 2019. Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 18 February 2020

The provisions on food information to consumers are laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011\(^1\) of the European Parliament and of the Council (hereinafter, the Regulation). This Regulation aims to enable consumers to make informed food choices.

In relation to the petitioner’s request, the Commission would like to point out that Article 13(2) and (3) of the Regulation require a minimum font size for mandatory food information. For packages where the largest surface has an area of 80 cm\(^2\) or more, the x-height, as defined in Annex IV, must be equal to or greater than 1.2 mm. For packages where the largest surface is less than 80 cm\(^2\), the x-height must be equal to or greater than 0.9 mm. Those minimum font sizes are the result of negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament that took place during the adoption of the Regulation.

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The Regulation also provides for a comprehensive approach in order to take into account several aspects related to legibility. The Regulation defines ‘legibility’ as ‘the physical appearance of information, by means of which the information is visually accessible to the general population and which is determined by various elements, inter alia, font size, letter spacing, spacing between lines, stroke width, type color, typeface, width-height ratio of the letters, the surface of the material and significant contrast between the print and the background’.

In addition, the Regulation requires that food information must be marked in a conspicuous place in such a way as to be easily visible, clearly legible and, where appropriate, indelible. It shall not in any way be hidden, obscured, detracted from or interrupted by any other written or pictorial matter or any other intervening material. Moreover, the Regulation stipulates that voluntary food information shall not be displayed to the detriment of the space available for mandatory food information.

Furthermore, for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the Regulation, the Commission shall, by means of delegated acts, establish rules for legibility. In this context, while the preparatory work related to this delegated act has not yet started, the rules to be established should clarify the meaning of the various elements related to the definition of legibility to ensure a harmonised approach and improve the implementation of those provisions.

Food business operators must ensure that foods satisfy the above requirements of food law, including those on minimum font size and legibility of food information. It is the Member States’ responsibility to enforce food law, and to monitor and verify that the relevant requirements are fulfilled by the food business operators.

**Conclusion**

With Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011, the legislators have recognised the importance of food information to be easily legible. The Regulation requires a minimum font size for mandatory food information and provides a comprehensive approach to ensure its legibility.

While the petitioner’s request relates only to the need for a greater font size to improve the legibility of food labels, legibility is also determined by other elements such as letter spacing, spacing between lines, stroke width, type colour, typeface, width-height ratio of the letters, the surface of the material and significant contrast between the print and the background.

The Regulation foresees that the Commission shall, by means of delegated acts, establish rules on legibility to clarify the meaning of its various elements and ensure a harmonised implementation. However, the Commission cannot at this stage commit on the timeline for its adoption as it is not subject to a specific deadline.

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2 Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011, Article 2, paragraph 2 (m).