

V&V food labelling summary

Food labelling is currently governed by EU labelling law but also needs to fit with the international standards set by the FAO / WHO. The basic premise for food labelling is that they mustn't mislead. So in the case of any food labelled as suitable for vegetarians or vegans, it must be suitable for vegetarians or vegans. At first sight this is generally straight forward but there are some issues where further clarification would help. The UK government produced guidance in 2006 to help clarify some of the issues resulting arising from, for example, what constitutes as being suitable for vegetarians and what is permitted in a vegan diet. The guidance needs to be updated to reflect changes in the regulations but by-in-large the UK's guidance is the *defacto* standard for labelling foods as suitable for vegetarian and vegans across Europe.

Issues around what constitutes a vegetarian diet will depend on the individual. Some considered eggs as being unsuitable for vegetarians whilst others draw the line at fungi. Obviously the consumer needs to be reassured that products labelled as vegetarian should not contain any meat derived ingredients, the information on label should also ensure sufficient information is present for them to make an informed choice.

The problem for vegan labelling arises from the hidden ingredients such as the fining agents in wine and some other alcoholic drinks. Sometimes, but not always, the haze produced from yeast is cleared using egg protein or isinglass (made from the protein in fish swim bladders). These do not need to be labelled if the protein is not present in the final beer or wine. However, an animal product has still been used in the production of the wine and it would not be suitable for someone following a vegan diet. Unless a prepackaged food is specifically labelled as being suitable for vegans, its suitability would need to be investigated.