

CFS concludes enforcement actions on food labelling in 2023

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (February 9) concluded its enforcement actions on food labelling in 2023. The CFS inspected food labels of about 55 200 prepackaged foods and collected more than 930 prepackaged food samples from different retail outlets for testing if the energy and specified nutrient content (including total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugars, sodium, protein, carbohydrates, and more) are consistent with the declared values on their nutrition labels. The CFS has instituted 155 prosecutions against breaches of the stipulated requirements of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W). In addition, the CFS has announced the test results of the unsatisfactory samples and conducted corresponding follow-up actions.

Food labels and nutrition labels are the major channels of communication between food manufacturers and consumers. The food trade may use them as a tool to provide information and attract consumers to buy their products, and assist them in making informed and healthier dietary choices. Meanwhile, the labels may encourage food manufacturers to apply sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods and regulate misleading or deceptive labels and claims. According to the Ordinance and the Regulations, all prepackaged foods for sale in Hong Kong must be marked or labelled as required by the law. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The variations in seasons, processing practices, storage conditions, etc, may result in discrepancies in the nutrient values among the same product of different batches, yet it should be close to the declared values." To ensure the accuracy of food nutrition labels, Hong Kong has set tolerance limits for nutrient declarations with reference to the international standards and regional practices, and has included them in the technical guidance notes for general prepackaged foods as well as infants and young children formulae and foods. The CFS organises technical meetings and symposiums regularly to facilitate traders' compliance.

The spokesman reminded the trade to comply with the law, and urged members of the public to pay attention to the information on nutrition labels when purchasing foods to make informed food choices so as to maintain a balanced diet and stay healthy.