Health star rating system

As of 2014, retailers (such as supermarkets) and food manufacturers can choose to display the ‘Health Star Rating’ on the front of their products. The Health Star Rating system is a front-of-pack labelling scheme developed for use in Australia. The purpose of the Health Star Rating system is to provide convenient, relevant and readily understood nutrition information on food packages, to assist consumers to make informed food purchases and healthier eating choices.

The system uses a star rating scale of ½ to 5 stars. The more stars, the healthier the food.

The system also includes nutrient information icons for energy (kilojoules), saturated fat, sodium (salt), sugars and can include one positive nutrient such as ‘calcium’ or ‘fibre’.

The website for the Health Star Rating system can be accessed at www.healthstarrating.com.au. The website provides information about the Health Star Rating and contains key technical documents for industry about how to calculate and apply the Health Star Rating system to its products.

The following is an example of a health star rating.

![Health Star Rating Example](image)

While this is currently a voluntary system, if an evaluation after two years finds voluntary implementation to be unsuccessful, the system will become mandatory.

Pregnancy warnings on alcohol labels

A project will commence shortly to evaluate action taken by the alcohol industry in Australia in placing pregnancy warnings on alcohol products. Consideration of economic impacts and an extensive consultation process will be undertaken.

Health claims standard

Health claims are currently regulated by transitional Standard 1.1A.2 of the Code, which prohibits health claims, except for one relating to folate intake for women.

On 18 January 2013, a new food Standard for nutrition, health and related claims (Standard 1.2.7) became law, which sets out new rules to regulate nutrition content claims and health claims on food labels and in advertisements.

Currently, food businesses must comply with either Standard 1.2.7 or Standard 1.1A.2 (but not a combination of both) but must be fully compliant with the new standard from 18 January 2016.

Country of Origin labelling

Standard 1.2.11 of the Code was amended in 2006 to require all packaged food and unpackaged fruit and vegetables, fish, seafood and pork sold in Australia to be labelled with, or accompanied by, information stating the country of origin of the food.

On 18 July 2013, the requirement for country of origin labelling was extended to include unpackaged beef, lamb, hogget, mutton, chicken or a mix of these foods.

Low THC hemp in food

Hemp is different to other varieties of Cannabis sativa (marijuana). Hemp contains no, or very low, levels of THC (delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol), the chemical associated with the psychoactive properties of marijuana.

Hemp seeds contain protein, vitamins and minerals and polyunsaturated fatty acids, particularly omega-3 fatty acids. Hemp seed food products may provide an alternative dietary source of these nutrients. Currently, the use of hemp in food is prohibited by the Code.

In December 2012, the Forum sought a review of a Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) decision to approve an application to permit low THC hemp for sale as a food. In December 2013, the Forum agreed to further investigation by FSANZ of the potential issues relating to the use of low THC hemp in food products.
Review of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code

The Code was first published on 20 December 2000 and has been amended approximately 80 times since then.

An audit of the Code was undertaken in 2009 and FSANZ then prepared a Proposal to revise the Code in order to address a range of issues identified in that audit and consultations with regulators.

There has been a public consultation period, which ended on 27 September 2013. The next call for submissions is expected to be issued in the second quarter of 2014.

National competency unit codes

Codes and titles for national competency units often change with amendments to factors such as unit content.

Always refer to the online versions of the Food Safety Fact Sheets 17 Becoming an auditor and 18 Food safety supervisors to find the current codes and titles for the relevant competency units.

What’s happening in Queensland?

Mobile food business register

Under the Food Act 2006 (the Act), the Queensland Department of Health is required to keep a publicly available register of all licensed food businesses carried on from mobile premises (mobile food businesses) in Queensland.

Mobile food businesses are only required to have a licence with one local government for an area in Queensland in which the business intends to operate.

The register allows food regulators and the general public to identify whether a particular mobile food business has a licence to operate the food business in Queensland, and with which local government the licence is held. The mobile food business register is now available at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety/Documents/mobile-food-register.xls.

Food business rating schemes

On 30 October 2013, legislation was passed that removed the food business rating scheme provisions in the Act and this took effect on 7 November 2013.

The removal of the food business rating scheme provisions from the Act means that local governments are able to determine the best scheme for their area, taking into account the needs of the community and local food businesses.

Auditor verification framework

An audit verification framework has been developed and will be implemented by the Department of Health Food Safety Standards and Regulation team under the Act.

The Act audit verification system consists of check audits, witness audits, criminal history checks and other means considered appropriate by the Department of Health, to monitor and review the performance of auditors.

A document ‘Audit verification system’ has been developed to provide details of the audit verification framework and it is available from www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety/Documents/audit-verif-system.pdf.

Food safety fact sheets

Food Safety Standards and Regulation have recently developed a number of new documents and are currently undertaking a major review of the food safety website and all existing Queensland Health food safety resources.

New food safety resources include:

- Audit verification system, Food Act 2006 - described above.
- Report on local government activities 2011-2012. This is a report on the compliance activities of Queensland local governments by region.
- Egg safety for food businesses. This fact sheet outlines the food safety risks of using raw eggs in a food business and the associated legal obligations.
- Raw milk This fact sheet provides information about the risks associated with consuming raw milk and the legal requirements for the sale of milk and milk products.

Updated food safety resources include:

- Label Buster
- Meat and meat products
- Fish and fish products.

All Queensland Health food safety resources for the food industry and consumers can be accessed from www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

Subscription requests

If you wish to subscribe or unsubscribe to the Food Safety Update newsletter email distribution list, please email your request to Food Safety Standards and Regulation at foodsafety@health.qld.gov.au.

FSANZ also has a free electronic subscription service that sends alerts about new newsletters and other news items, allowing you to keep up with the latest developments in food regulation. To subscribe, go to www.foodstandards.gov.au/media/pages/subscriptionservice.aspx.