

Unilever Submission in response to P1031 (Allergen Labelling Exemptions)

23 September 2015

Unilever welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Proposal 1031 (Allergen Labelling Exemptions).

Unilever has a significant portfolio of food products in the Australian market including leading brands such as Continental, Flora, Dove, Streets, and Lipton Today, we employ more than 1800 people throughout offices and manufacturing sites across Australia. At present more than 70% of the products we sell in Australia and New Zealand are manufactured locally and are used every day by millions of Australians. Consumers trust us to provide them and their families with products that are safe.

We are strongly supportive of the provision of labelling information to better inform consumer choices and take our responsibility to provide transparency on the allergen content of our products for Australian consumers very seriously. Our company is an active member of the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC), Business Council of Australia (BCA), and Allergen Bureau and we wish to express our support for their submissions to this consultation.

In general, Unilever supports the FSANZ proposal which is to introduce allergen labelling exemptions to the Food Standards Code, where the evidence base supports negligible risk to allergic consumers, to bring about international consistency for allergen labelling.

In summary, we fully support the risk assessment management recommendations for the 3 allergen exemptions below which are evidence based and consistent with EU exemptions:

- N/RBD soybean oil,
- Phytosterols & tocopherols
- Alcohol distillates.

In regard to glucose syrup from wheat, we support the proposed allergen exemptions, however as per the risk assessment and subsequent proposal outlined by FSANZ, we do not support the proposed limit of **10mg/kg** level put forward whereby exemption will be permitted. Therefore, the focus of our submission will cover the risk assessment outcomes for glucose syrup from wheat starch.

Glucose Syrup from Wheat Starch

As per the risk assessment, FSANZ concluded that *“to ensure that gluten levels in glucose syrup are as low as technically achievable, the proposal is for glucose syrup made from wheat starch be exempted from mandatory allergen labelling where the residual gluten content is less than or equal to 10mg/kg”*.

We do not support the proposal for glucose syrup made from wheat starch to be exempted from mandatory allergen labelling where the residual gluten content is less than or equal to 10mg/kg” given the following reasons;

- (1) FSANZ has concluded in the risk assessment that there is a similar level of risk for 10-20ppm. The risk assessment concluded that *“based on the available clinical evidence and likely single meal consumption, wheat-derived glucose syrup with a gluten content of **10–20 mg/kg** is likely to present a negligible risk to the majority of wheat allergic individuals”*.

Therefore the lower level of 10ppm provides not greater level of protection for the allergic consumer.

- (2) At a manufacturing level, being required to operate at the 10ppm level will impose a significant extra cost to the business, where there is not a demonstrated benefit. From a compliance perspective, the 10ppm cut off makes things extremely complex throughout the whole supply chain (starting with the glucose supplier, through the supply chain to the finished product). If we take the manufacture of Ice Cream for example, there are some scenarios (below) which highlight the complexities in obtaining the compliance information with a 10ppm cut off due to the fact the glucose syrup is part of a compound ingredient used as part of the formulation.

- Glucose syrup could be added to a biscuit that is then supplied for making an ice cream and the whole product is imported into Australia;

OR

- Glucose syrup could be added to a flavour, that is then supplied to a syrup manufacturer, who then supply the syrup to be incorporated into an ice cream, which is then imported into Australia.

The above examples are not unique to Ice Cream manufacture, as the case is similar for the Confectionery industry who are also very interested in this exemption as many confectionery and chocolate contain glucose syrup as part of a compound ingredient. Glucose can also be used in Savoury products but not so widely.

- (3) Finally the 10ppm cut off is not consistent with the EU labelling exemption where wheat-based glucose syrups including dextrose, wheat-based maltodextrins and products thereof are exempt from allergen labelling if gluten levels are less than 20ppm. In Europe regulatory agencies have reviewed specific refined ingredients and advised they are unlikely to result in allergic reactions if consumed by sensitive consumers and exemptions are incorporated into allergen labelling regulations. Concurrent with the Exemption was the Gluten free decision and this is being used as the way to demonstrate compliance with EU exemption by industry with glucose suppliers. The EU glucose industry have addressed products being made to good manufacturing practice by putting in place a Code of Practice they all work to.

To summarise our position in regard to glucose syrup from wheat, we do not support the following points which are identified as per the FSANZ risk assessment. We strongly recommend FSANZ consider a similar situation for ANZ and remove the limit of 10ppm and instead work towards GMP or provide a limit for 20ppm.

1. There is a similar level of risk for 10-20mg/kg;
2. The local manufacturer does NOT support the 10mg/kg level and being required to operate at this level will impose significant extra cost, where there is not a demonstrated benefit;
3. This is not consistent with the EU labelling exemption in practice – a region that relies heavily on wheat-based glucose syrup similar to ANZ.