



ANIMAL SCIENCE

STEAK SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

YOUTH MEAT SCIENCE CURRICULUM
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EXTENSION What's in a Label?

Quick overview: When walking through the grocery store, there are hundreds of items trying to catch your attention. Often times, this is done by the label. Although the look of packaging and labels on products can vary greatly, there are some statements that are required to be included to share specific information with the consumer. In this lesson, students will learn what is required on a food label and why each component is important.

Materials Needed:

- Various labels from products containing meat (pictures or actual labels will suffice. At least 2 per group. Can use the same or vary between groups)
- Notebooks, flip chart or small whiteboards

Directions:

- Divide the students into groups and give them each at least 2 food labels.
- Ask the students to look at the labels and try to identify the 7 things that are included on both labels.
- Bring the group together and discuss their findings.
- As they find the commonalities between the labels, talk about the importance of each piece and what that information conveys to the consumer. Ask the students why they think each component is important.

The Science:

Walking through the grocery store, it's amazing to see the sheer number of products available. Sometimes it seems that there are 10 different versions of the same thing with the only difference being the label. Although labels can vary greatly in color, images, and type of packaging, there are 7 required components that must be included.

- **Proper Product Name:** This means there needs to be a name and statement on the package that gives a truthful description of the product. This allows the consumer to fully understand what product they are purchasing.

PRIOR TO:

Delivery Type: Group activity: In-person or virtual

Prep work: Gather labels (images, from canned food items, bag or box packaging, etc.)

Discussion Point: Imagine you are buying snacks at the grocery store. What catches your eye in a new product? Do you ever read what is included on the label? Why is it important for there to be guidelines in place for what needs to be included on a label?



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The Science Continued:

- **Nutritional Information:** The nutrition label is a valuable resource to determine the calories, fat, vitamins, and more that are available within that product. This allows consumers to monitor their dietary needs and make purchasing decisions that best match what they are seeking in a diet.
- **Ingredient List:** As simple as it sounds, the label needs to include what is inside the package. Ingredients are listed in order of quantity (ie. the first ingredient on the list is the most abundant ingredient in the product). In addition to simply listing the ingredients used, allergens need to be highlighted.
- **Name and Address of Distributor:** On every food product available there is a section that contains the name and physical address of where the product was made. This allows for traceability of the product in case of a recall.
- **Accurate Statement of Net Quantity:** This explains how much of the product is available for purchase. This is a great tool to use to compare price per ounce between brands.
- **Safe Handling Statement:** Meat products are required to provide a description of how to handle the product to keep it safe for consumption. This may be a statement such as; “Keep Frozen,” or “Fully Cooked, Ready to Eat,” or “Refrigerate After Opening”. The purpose of these statements is twofold, protecting the consumer and protecting the processor from getting in trouble if the consumer misuses the product.

Picture this: It's a beautiful, sunny, 80 degree summer day. A woman is having friends over for a picnic and is planning to grill hamburgers. She goes to the grocery store and buys ground beef, buns and pickles, which she then leaves in her car for a few hours while she runs other errands. Once she is home, she leaves the ground beef on the kitchen counter for another hour before lighting the grill. The party is great, but later that evening many of those in attendance become ill. The buns didn't make them sick, and it probably wasn't the pickles, so that leaves the beef. The ground beef label told her that she needed to keep the product refrigerated or frozen until it was ready to be prepared. She didn't listen to this and instead let the product reach an unsafe temperature, putting her and her friends at risk for getting sick. Long story short, listen to the label!

- **Inspection stamp:** All meat products are legally required to be deemed safe by a USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) inspector in order to be sold. All meat that is available for sale is legally required to be inspected for wholesomeness to ensure that the product is safe for human consumption.

All labels must be legally approved to be used. Many of the requirements of a label are there for safety reasons. Knowing that food is inspected, how to handle it, and if there are any known allergens is necessary to keep consumers safe.

Discussion Point: Do you know the 8 allergens required to be highlighted on a food label?

Milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soy.



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DISCUSSION POINT

How does the label promote food safety?

DISCUSSION POINT

Descriptive title/describe what the product is, declared allergens, USDA stamp of inspection, traceability, safe handling statement, etc.

One of the main reasons for recalls is due to inaccurate ingredient lists or undeclared allergens. This can lead to many people getting sick by unknowingly consuming products they may react poorly to.





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4-H ADAPTATION

Presentations/Poster: Students could prepare an oral presentation or poster about the topic promoting agricultural literacy or healthy living.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will gain an ability to decipher information included on a food label. Additionally, students will make connections between label components, health and product safety.



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