

Diet and health

Indicators

Additives prohibited

Nutritional content: salt

Nutritional content: fats and sugar

Nutritional labelling

Promotions, marketing and information

Targets 2009

- ✔ Apply traffic-light labelling that meets FSA criteria to 200 products that are outside the FSA priority list during 2009 (page 38).
- ✔ Ensure FSA salt targets published in 2006 are met in all relevant Co-operative own-brand product categories by the end of 2009 (page 37).
- ✔ Support at least one government diet and health initiative in-store every week throughout 2009 (page 38).
- ⚠ Increase participation in jogscotland to 5,000 in 2009 (page 39).
- ✔ Launch a targeted 'Health Club' mailing programme to raise awareness of healthy eating amongst member-customers in 2009 (page 38).

✔ target achieved ⚠ close to target ✖ target not achieved
 = on track ⬅ behind schedule

Targets 2010

- Achieve an average overall reduction in salt and saturated fat levels in crisps and snacks range.
- Launch a new front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme.
- Roll out traffic-light labelling to all relevant corporate website and magazine recipes.
- Extend The Co-operative Pharmacy Weight Management service to a total of 240 branches.
- Use in-store digital media to support key public health targets every week throughout 2010.

Background

Today's consumers are presented with a choice of foods and products unimaginable a century ago. While the majority welcome this improvement in choice, many consumers are concerned about food production methods and their impact on health. Improving the health of the nation is one of the great challenges for 21st century Britain, and it is recognised that diet plays an important part in promoting good health¹.

Materiality and strategy

The Co-operative's commitment to this issue can be traced back to the beginning of the modern co-operative movement, when the Rochdale Pioneers sought to sell good-quality produce at a time when items such as milk, flour and bread were regularly adulterated with the likes of alum and ground limestone. Food integrity is still a priority for consumers, although the issues of concern are, today, somewhat different.

Over 100,000 members have endorsed a number of food quality, diet and health commitments for inclusion in The Co-operative Food Ethical Policy², including: maintaining a leading position amongst UK retailers in the removal of additives, increasing the proportion of healthy offerings available to customers; and including clear, honest and progressive labelling on products. Reducing salt, saturated fat and sugar consumption, and utilising front-of-pack nutritional labelling are key issues for the food retail industry and are the focus of a number of government campaigns and initiatives to improve the nation's health. As such, The Co-operative Food considers these issues to be priorities for the business.

The Co-operative Food focuses its diet and health activities on the reformulation and labelling of own-brand products, along with the promotion and marketing of healthier products across both own-brand ranges and branded products. In addition, it continues to identify opportunities to promote aspects of a healthy lifestyle, through influencing and engaging members, customers and the wider community.

Product ranges

During 2009, Co-operative own-brand products accounted for 46% of The Co-operative Food's sales by value (2008: 44%). In 2009, own-brand products fell into three main ranges: Simply Value (economy range), The Co-operative (standard range) and Truly Irresistible (premium range), along with four cross-range sub-brands: Healthy Living, The Co-operative Farms Grown by us, Fairtrade and Organic³. The Healthy Living range⁴ currently includes products branded Healthy Living, in addition to 'Reduced' products and 'Naturally Healthy' products, which do not have Healthy Living branding. In 2010, a new Co-operative sub-brand, Healthier Choice, is to be launched. This will bring together all products from the existing Healthy Living range, under a consistent 'Healthier Choice' branding, with a view to making it easier for consumers to identify healthier products and make balanced food choices.

During 2009, reformulation and rebranding of Somerfield products to The Co-operative brand progressed, and as at January 2010, 30 Somerfield product categories had been rebranded to The Co-operative brand.

Achievements

1986 In the absence of a UK-wide scheme, becomes first retailer to develop nutrition labelling using the terms HIGH, MEDIUM and LOW.

1995 Challenges suppliers to reduce amount of fat and salt in own-brand products to help achieve the Department of Health's Nutrition Task Force targets. Becomes the first retailer to label calories and fat content per serving on the front-of-product packaging and grams of salt on the reverse.

2005 Removes artificial colours from all own-brand products. Includes information on packaging on the amount of caffeine per serving in tea, coffee and chocolate.

2007 Removes hydrogenated vegetable oils from all own-brand products.

2008 Launches the first traffic-light labelling scheme for foods sold loose.

2009 Meets Food Standards Agency (FSA) salt targets in all relevant own-brand product categories.

Basic assurance

All own-brand fruit, vegetables and salad produced in the UK meet the terms of the Assured Produce Scheme (APS)⁵, which promotes basic standards of horticultural practice regarding the use of pesticides and fertilisers. It is one of the schemes covered by the Assured British Farm Standard and, like other products falling under the standard, is identified by the 'Red Tractor' symbol. The scheme is benchmarked against GlobalGAP, the worldwide standard for good agricultural practice. Standards in relation to meat, poultry and dairy are detailed on pages 31–33.

Additives

An Additives Policy has been in place since 1985, and the business seeks to use additives as little as possible⁶, whilst recognising benefits in areas such as food safety. The Co-operative Food has removed additives of current scientific concern from products and maintains an awareness of customer and member expectations with regard to additives. Whilst future work may be required, for example, in light of new research and recommendations, The Co-operative Food is not, at present, actively progressing the removal of any further additives that are not already prohibited.

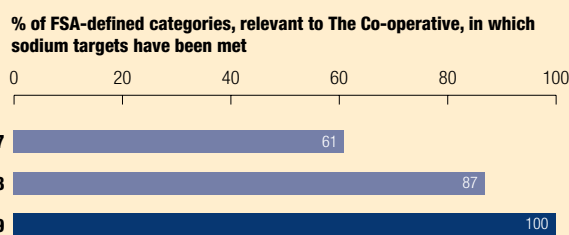
Nutritional content

In 2008, the Government published 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Lives', which included a Healthy Food Code of Good Practice⁷, challenging the food and drink industry to support a range of measures aimed at improving the nation's diet. A number of initiatives that support this healthy eating agenda have been progressed, including support for traffic-light labelling, Green Dot labelling, increasing the promotion of healthy food and product reformulation.

Alongside the reformulation of products, with a view to making them healthier, the business seeks to provide customers with comprehensive, reliable advice on a healthy diet and lifestyle and equip them with the knowledge to make informed choices. In addition, all products in The Co-operative Simply Value range⁸ have nutritional levels no worse than those of standard and premium equivalents⁹. Somerfield products are required to comply with The Co-operative's nutritional policy as they are rebranded.

Salt

Progress against FSA sodium targets for product categories



Following the publication of targets for sodium levels in foods by the FSA in 2006, the target of meeting these across all relevant own-brand product categories by the end of 2009 was achieved.

Salt is the major source of sodium in the UK diet and The Co-operative Food seeks to reduce salt levels in specific own-brand products and ranges as they are reformulated. During 2009, the business launched a range of reduced-salt British wafer-thin ham, with products across the range containing 30% less salt than the previous recipe¹⁰. Work is underway to launch other reduced-salt products during 2010. For example, The Co-operative's crisps and snacks range will be reformulated to reduce salt and saturated fat content.

Performance benchmark

The Food Standards Agency lists The Co-operative as one of three retailers to have met existing sodium targets across all relevant product ranges by March 2010¹¹.

Saturated fat and sugar

The Co-operative Food has committed to review and revise its approach to the reduction of saturated fat and sugar in its own-brand products, taking into account the recommendations made in the FSA's Saturated Fat and Energy Intake Programme¹² published in 2008. In July 2009, the FSA launched consultations on saturated fat and sugar¹³. The results of both consultations are due in 2010 and The Co-operative Food has committed to using the recommendations to develop its approach accordingly.

The New Product Development process¹⁴ requires that the composition of reformulated products yields no increases in the proportion of unhealthier fats, such as saturated fat, whilst seeking to reduce the fat content overall. Reducing saturated fat in products is particularly challenging, and may involve not only the use of alternative ingredients and recipes but new technology and methods of production. Additionally, a maximum sugar level of 5% is in place for all savoury products in the 'Healthy Living' range.

During 2009, work to reduce the saturated fat content of products progressed, with developments including:

- Frozen ready meals range: 23% saturated fat reduction achieved through measures including the use of leaner meat and less oil and fat.
- Pasta sauce range: 15% saturated fat reduction by moving away from the use of high saturated fat ingredients, such as cream, oil, cheese and butter.
- Own-brand 1% fat milk: Launched in July 2009, this has 40% less fat than semi-skimmed milk.

Labelling

The Co-operative Food seeks to be open and honest in its approach to labelling, and to provide information in a way that allows customers to make informed purchasing decisions about food products¹⁵.

Traffic-light labelling

Traffic-light labelling enables customers to quickly discern whether the food has high, medium or low amounts of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugars, and to enable them to compare products at a glance. In 2008, following more than a decade of front-of-pack nutrition labelling, The Co-operative Food committed to roll out traffic-light labelling across own-brand products¹⁶, as they were launched or rebranded. ☉ By the end of 2009, traffic-light nutrient signposting had been applied to all products in FSA priority areas that were rebranded/reformulated, and rolled out to 631 products outside the FSA priority list.



Traffic-light label. Front-of-pack traffic-light labelling makes it easier for consumers to seek out healthier products and to eat more healthily.

Green Dot labelling

'Green Dot' labelling was launched in January 2009. These labels incorporate nutritional messages, such as 'high fibre', 'low saturated fat', and 'rich in omega 3', within a green dot graphic¹⁷ and are used alongside traffic-light labelling to enable customers to easily identify healthier choices. Green dots are applied to own-brand product packaging, regardless of the product range within which they fall, that do not carry any 'red' traffic lights, and that fulfil the relevant nutritional criteria. As of December 2009, 840 green dot products were on sale, making up almost a third of the own-brand offering, and accounting for 15% of overall sales¹⁸. During 2010, The Co-operative Food will continue to promote green dot products through in-store media.



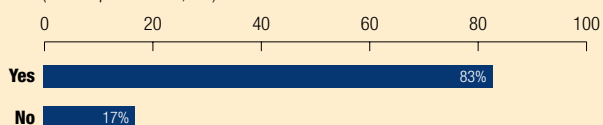
Green Dot labelling incorporating nutritional messages.

InSight customer feedback

Chip and pin terminal survey of The Co-operative Food customers, conducted 11–17 January 2009 (page 111)

Question: 'Have you tried our healthier Green Dot products?'

(total responses: 302,120)



Performance benchmark

In 2008, of the eight supermarkets surveyed by the National Consumer Council¹⁹, The Co-operative was ranked second in its use of colour-coded (traffic-light) signposting in line with FSA criteria, and sixth in its use of Guideline Daily Amounts.

Promotions, marketing and information

Healthier eating options are promoted in-store, using devices such as shelf-edge labelling, till screens and radio, as well as on The Co-operative Food website. Additionally, the Customer Relations team (page 110) acts as a first point of contact for all customer queries relating to products and their ingredients.

The Co-operative Food prohibits the marketing or advertising to children of products that are high in fat, sugar or salt. This policy extends to free samples at in-store demonstrations and promotions; the use of popular children's characters on the packaging of own-brand products; and products that are high in fat, sugar or salt and aimed specifically at children, being located near the point of purchase.

As part of its responsible approach to promotional activity, the business stipulates that healthier products²⁰ should constitute a minimum of 25%²¹ of all price promotions²². This is monitored at the end of each promotional period to ensure compliance. During 2009, 32% of promotions were for healthier products.

☉ The Co-operative Food supported at least one government diet and health initiative in every store, every week throughout 2009. Initiatives supported were: The Department of Health's Change4Life programme and Know your Limits campaign, the FSA's salt and saturated fat reduction campaigns, and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) Love Food, Hate Waste campaign.

☉ A 'Health Club' mailing programme was launched in 2009, to raise awareness of healthy eating amongst member customers. 500,000 received direct mailings and emails that included healthy recipes, exercise tips and money-off vouchers for fruit and vegetables.

The Co-operative Pharmacy launched its Healthy Heart initiative during 2009. A total of 21 branches offer customers a health evaluation, which includes checks on blood pressure, cholesterol, body mass index (BMI) and blood glucose. Also launched during 2009 were an Allergy Check service (at the same 21 Pharmacy branches), and a Weight Management service, which, by the end of 2009, was offered at 85 Pharmacy branches, and is to be extended to a total of 240 branches in 2010. Selected branches of The Co-operative Pharmacy offer free NHS services to customers on other health issues, including smoking cessation, sexual health and minor ailments.

Performance benchmark

In 2008, of the eight supermarkets surveyed by the National Consumer Council²³, The Co-operative was ranked second on its in-store promotions of fruit and vegetables, and had the lowest number of promotions for fatty and sugary foods. The Co-operative was also ranked joint first for not displaying sweets at the checkout and for in-store promotion of the five-a-day message.

Community involvement

Food education: From Farm to Fork

From Farm to Fork²⁴ is designed to enable children from primary schools to visit one of The Co-operative's working farms, providing them with a learning experience that promotes greater insight into how food crops are grown and harvested, and how important healthy eating is. The programme, which started in 2005, was extended to a further Co-operative Farm, Down Ampney, during 2009, bringing the total number of sites running the programme to eight. In 2009, 632 classes, totalling some 17,500 children, visited Co-operative Farms.

Promoting exercise

In 2009, The Co-operative was the lead sponsor of jogscotland for a fourth year. jogscotland aims to contribute to improvements in physical activity levels and health, through co-ordinated programmes of walking, jogging and running.

© In 2009, participation in the jogscotland 5k Challenge events, sponsored by The Co-operative, increased by over 30% to 4,771 over five venues, and participation in the corresponding junior runs at these events increased by over 200%, with junior runs taking place at all venues for the first time.

The Co-operative is also promoting 'Walking Buses' as a healthier way for children to travel to school (page 65).



Promoting exercise through jogscotland. The Co-operative Group was a lead sponsor of the initiative in 2009.

Influence and action

GovNet event

In March 2009, The Co-operative Food sponsored the GovNet Obesity Conference. The conference brought together over 400 health, education and local government professionals, central and local government speakers from across the UK, as well as other stakeholder groups. The event focused on the latest and most effective strategies in dealing with the obesity crisis. Sponsorship is set to continue in 2010.

Read more in this Report

- Support for, and sales of, organics (pages 31–34).
- Animal welfare (pages 30–35)
- The Co-operative Food Chemicals Strategy (pages 82–83).
- The Co-operative Food Pesticides Policy (pages 83–84).
- Healthier travel to school: Walking Buses (page 65).

Accompanying notes

- 1 www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/food/food_matters1.pdf
- 2 www.co-operative.coop/food/ethics
- 3 Healthy Living, The Co-operative Farms and Fairtrade products can sit in any range; Organic products can sit in The Co-operative or Truly Irresistible ranges only.
- 4 The Healthy Living range accounted for 1.8% of own-brand product sales in 2009.
- 5 The Assured Produce Scheme (APS) is designed to give consumers confidence in the safety and integrity of fruit, vegetables and salad produce. Growers must follow production advice contained in the crop-specific protocols that form the basis of the scheme, which is independently assessed. The Co-operative is represented on the APS Technical Committee. www.assuredproduce.co.uk
- 6 www.co-operative.coop/food
- 7 www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2008/jul/healthyfoodcode
- 8 The Simply Value range accounted for 0.4% of own-brand product sales in 2009.
- 9 Of the 93 products that make up the Simply Value range, 39 have comparable equivalents in the standard ranges. Achieved within the tolerances accepted for nutritional analytical variation; or where the sugar content of an economy-range product (eg, own-brand value cheese and tomato pizza) is slightly higher than the standard equivalent, owing to an increased proportion of fruit/veg, and consequently naturally-occurring sugars.
- 10 Products in the range contain 30% less salt compared to the previous product.
- 11 Asda and Waitrose have also met the targets. www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2010/mar/saltcommitments
- 12 www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/satfatprog.pdf
- 13 Draft recommendations on saturated fat and added sugar reductions, and portion size availability, for biscuits, cakes, pastries, buns, chocolate confectionery and soft drinks. www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/consultation/consultsatfat.pdf
Draft recommendations on promotion of lower-fat products, including dairy products, fat and saturated fat reductions for meat products, and portion size availability for savoury snacks. www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2009/promolowfatprodssatfatreductions
- 14 All products that are new, relaunched or rebranded must go through this process.
- 15 www.co-operative.coop/food/ethics/diet-health
- 16 Except those of negligible nutritional value (eg, tea and coffee), some 'assorted' products (eg, seasonal tins of biscuits) and fruit and vegetables (which carry a 5-a-day message).
- 17 'Green Dot' messages are based on approved nutrition claims under the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation (EC) 1924/2006 plus omega 3, wholegrain and 5-a-day claims. The Green Dot nutritional messages are: 5-a-day, low saturated fat, low fat, low sugar, high fibre, source of fibre, source of calcium, wholegrain, and rich in omega 3.
- 18 Green Dot sales comprised 33% of own-brand sales and 16% of total sales (excluding non-food products).
- 19 National Consumer Council (2008) 'Cut price what cost?'. Supermarkets surveyed were: The Co-operative, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Asda, Tesco, Somerfield and Morrisons.
- 20 Healthier products being defined as either: produce, products passing through the FSA nutrient profiling model used by OFCOM, or any of The Co-operative Food's Healthy Living range.
- 21 25% of promotions, by number.
- 22 Food promotions exclude non-food grocery and beers, wines and spirits.
- 23 Ibid footnote 19.
- 24 www.fromfarmtofork.co.uk