



EUVepro POSITION ON HEALTH CLAIMS

Introducing the soya protein health claims

The FDA (U.S.A.) health claims

In May 1998, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was requested to authorize a health claim regarding the relationship between consumption of soya protein and the reduced risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). Following extensive examination of the request and its supporting scientific evidence the FDA proposed authorization of a health claim describing the association of consumption of soya protein and reduced risk of CHD in November 1998. The soya protein health claim was authorized for use on food labelling in October 1999.

The JHCI (UK) health claims

In the United Kingdom the Joint Health Claims Initiative (JHCI), a unique venture between consumer organisations, enforcement authorities and industry associations, which operates a code of practise for making health claims about foods, approved a claim for use in certain foods containing soya protein. In the case of the UK, the approved claim links consumption of soya protein with reduction in blood cholesterol levels.

Soya protein meets the challenge

Soya protein meets the requirements of the FDA because it is a food with a proven safety record. It has, for instance, been the major protein source for a sizable portion of the world's population for thousands of years and there is abundant scientific evidence supporting the health claim request (more than 160 papers were quoted in the FDA health claim proposal).

The soya protein health claims

The health claim authorized for use in USA states that “consuming 25 grams of soya protein a day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of CHD”. In order for a food to bear this claim one serving of the food must provide at least one quarter of the minimum daily amount (i.e. 6.25 grams of soy protein).

The health claim allowed in UK states “The inclusion of at least 25 grams of soya protein per day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat, can help reduce blood cholesterol levels”. In the case of the United Kingdom, foods bearing this claim must provide at least 20% of the minimum daily amount (i.e. 5 grams of soy protein).

The role of soya and health in the EU

There is no doubt that heart disease is the number one killer of adult men and women in USA and the United Kingdom as well as in the EU as a whole, and so poses a very real risk to the population.

The endorsement of the scientific findings by JHCI and FDA is of relevance to all food manufacturers, health authorities, the medical community and consumers in the EU. Consumers have a growing awareness of the relationship between nutrition and health – indeed many health authorities have initiated active policies to encourage prevention of many major diseases.

The technology to incorporate soya protein into excellent tasting mainstream products is available today.

All of this should encourage the general population in the EU to include 25 grams of soya protein in their daily diet. But there are potentially many more health benefits attributed to soya which may give rise to other health claims in the future in such areas as reducing the risk of breast or prostate cancer, improvement in bone health and reduction in menopausal symptoms.

EU health claims legislation

The EU prohibits preventive, therapeutic and curative claims for human diseases on foodstuffs, and also prohibits reference to such effects or properties (Directive 2000/13/EC).

However, the Commission has recently put forward a proposal aiming at the adoption of new legislation in the field of nutrition and health claims (COM(2003) 424 final). This proposal for a Regulation maintains the prohibition on claims referring to the prevention, treatment or cure of a human disease, but introduces a derogation providing for the use of "reduction of disease risk claims". This kind of claim would be allowed whenever it is substantiated that the consumption of a particular food may significantly reduce a risk factor in the development of a human disease.

The proposal for a new Regulation is currently under discussion and CIAA (Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the EU) has, principally, expressed concerns on the formulation and meaning of Articles 4 (Restrictions on the use of nutrition and health claims) and 11 (Implied health claims) of the proposal. Euvepro supports CIAA's concerns on the new nutrition and health claims proposal and also supports CIAA's European Code of Practice to help manufacturers prepare the documentation necessary for the substantiation of health claims and to establish guidelines for the communication of approved claims to consumers.