



## FDA Considers Nation-wide Food Labeling System

The nation's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) met to gather comments from industry, health groups, advocacy organizations and medical experts on the use of an agreed-upon labeling system for nutrition symbols on food packaging.

**A number of countries** have already instituted voluntary labeling systems for government-designed nutrition symbols. The UK's traffic light labels are an example of such a system.

**In the US**, a lack of government labeling guidelines has resulted in a proliferation of nutrient symbols and marks designed by individual companies, trade groups, or nutrition and health organizations (*PepsiCo's Smart Spot label, below*).



**According to Michael Jacobson**, director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), an agreed-upon system for food labeling is much needed, but it isn't clear which labeling approach is best—voluntary 'good food' logos, traffic-light icons on all foods, numerical scores or others.

**The stars have it?!** A food labeling system instituted at Hannaford Brothers Company, a 160-store supermarket chain based in Maine, has shown promising results in the last year. Using a star symbol, foods were marked as unhealthy (no stars), more healthful products (one or two stars), or most healthy (three stars). Sales of products that got stars grew twice as fast as less healthy similar items

- ★ Purchases of star-rated frozen food dinners increased at four times the rate of unstarred ones
- ★ Sales of lean ground beef products with stars grew seven percent while sales of other ground beef brands dropped five percent
- ★ Sales of fat-free milk rose one percent and whole milk sales went down five percent

**The FDA stressed that the discussion is only preliminary and that implementing any nation-wide food labeling system would be years down the line. If a national labeling system could be agreed upon and implemented, it would likely remain voluntary.**