



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement

3 August 2017

LABELLING OF FOREIGN FOOD PRODUCTS

A recent survey conducted by Consumers' Association of Penang shows that many foreign food products from China, Thailand, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Korea do not comply with the Food Regulations 1985 Part IV (Labelling) and the Trade Descriptions Act 1972 Part II Section 6(1) accordingly.

The labels on these products do not have the name and address of the importer, distributor and the ingredients contained within the products. Moreover, the language used on the labels also uses the language of the respective country rather than in Bahasa Malaysia as required under the Acts.

In the first instance these products should not have been able to come into the country if we are really serious about the health and religious concerns of our rakyat.

We may assume that products sold are safe to consume but there are things that we may overlook. We have to ascertain if the packaged food is 'Halal' or whether the ingredients can cause severe side effects or, in more serious cases, death.

An example of which is a person may collapse and die from anaphylactic shock if he or she accidentally consumes a food product that contains an ingredient that he or she is allergic to. The label serves no purpose if the ingredients are declared in a foreign language which Malaysians are unable to read. For this reason, he or she may end up hospitalised or dead.

The label serves as an important source of information that helps us to make wise and safe dietary choices.

Consumers are also exposing themselves to food additives that they know nothing about such as the use of E-numbers and chemical names. It is possible for manufacturers to state E102 instead of the yellow compound tartrazine which some people might be allergic to, particularly those intolerant to azo dyes.

Consumers may not know that E249 is the E-number for potassium nitrite and E252 for potassium nitrate. These chemicals are used mostly in preserved meats and they can be converted into nitrosamines by the digestive system. Most nitrosamines are carcinogens.

Although E-numbers accepted to be used as codes for food additives within the European Union, Malaysia should ban the use of E-numbers. This is because consumers may not know what these codes represent.

The responsibility of ensuring that imported food products are abiding by the laws is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, and The Ministry of Domestic Trade Co-Operatives And Consumerism; that of halal/haram issues is within the ambit of JAKIM; and the food industry (including importers) is to abide by the various Acts, Regulations, and Guidelines set up.

Shelf life of perishable food products should be clearly printed. The authorities should also ensure that food that have expired shelf life are not sent for repacking and have a new shelf life printed on the new packaging. The determination of shelf life is critical because the onus is placed on the manufacturers to do it.

To facilitate better control over the importation of food products, we propose that food products should only be sent to a specific port before their distribution to the importers. This is to enable a more efficient monitoring of food products coming into the country to ensure that they are compliant to our legal requirements.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) therefore urges the authorities to ensure that food products that have labels solely in a foreign language be taken off the shelves and for retailers to ensure that such products are not sold at their outlets. Otherwise it will be making a mockery of the law.

S. M. Mohamed Idris
President
Consumers Association of Penang