You can improve labels

Save food labels that you consider especially good or bad. Write to the company and tell why the label was helpful or useless. Enclose an example of a label you particularly like. Food companies want to include the information you find most helpful on their labels.

Become familiar with food standards

For some foods standards of identity, quality, and fill of container have been set. Standards are fixed by the order of the secretary of the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to promote honesty and fair dealings in the interest of consumers.*

A definition and standard of identity tells of what ingredients a food should be made, and it sometimes specifies proportions. Standards require that certain basic ingredients must be used and designate other ingredients which may be used at the packer’s option. No other ingredients may be added.

You will rarely see below-standard quality or fill in products sold in containers in Oregon retail markets.

Why are all ingredients not always listed?

Do not look for a full list of ingredients on the label of a food for which a definition and standard of identity has been set. Ingredients are named in the standards and need not be listed on labels.

If for dietary reasons, it is necessary for you to know the ingredients used in a food for which a standard of identity has been set, write to the company listed on the container.

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* The Food and Drug Administration permits the establishment of standards for foods when these standards are in the public interest. Canned peas, mayonnaise, and margarine are among foods for which standards of identity have been set. Labels on these and other standardized foods need not have ingredients listed.
When shopping for food, read the labels. Don't guess! Labels help you identify food products and choose those best suited for intended use. Labels on cans and packages are guides to better buymanship. To know which is the better buy, read the list of ingredients. Ingredients should be itemized according to their predominance.

When checking two brands of condensed cream of chicken soup, you might find the following ingredients listed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand A</th>
<th>Brand B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicken stock</td>
<td>Chicken broth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREAM</td>
<td>CREAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriched wheat flour</td>
<td>Carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>Wheat flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Vegetable oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable oil</td>
<td>Onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn starch</td>
<td>CREAM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You should expect to find more chicken in Brand B than in Brand A and more cream in Brand A than Brand B, according to the ingredients listed. Your family may prefer either Brand A or Brand B. Only by tasting each brand can you decide which one to buy for your family.

Two kinds of information on labels

► Information required by the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act requires all labels on food entering interstate commerce to include:

- The product name.
- The name and address of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor.
- The net contents of the container, by weight, liquid measure, or numerical count, according to the nature of the product.
- The variety, style, and packing medium of the product when relevant; such as cream style corn or peaches packed in water, light syrup, or heavy syrup.
- A statement of special dietary properties, if such are claimed.
- Statement of artificial coloring, flavoring, or chemical preservatives (if such are used).
- A list of the common or usual name of each ingredient, when two or more go into a product for which no legal standards exist. The order of listing indicates the relative amount of each food—the ingredient present in largest quantity comes first.
- Statement if quality or fill is substandard.
- The word “imitation” immediately preceding the name of the food imitated, if the food purports to be or resembles a food for which a definition and standard of identity has been established but which fails to conform to that standard.

► Information volunteered by the manufacturer, packer, or distributor.

Labels carry helpful information volunteered by industry. In addition to that required by law, items often found are:

- Brand name.
- A picture of the product.
- Quantity information such as number of servings, pieces, or cups.
- Size or degree of maturity for products like peas, so the consumer can select very young, young, or nearly mature peas according to her flavor preference.
- Color.
- Degree of seasoning.
- Recipe panel to provide directions for using the product successfully.

Information volunteered must be truthful and in English. It must be easy to understand and read.

Food labels improve your choices

Labels take guesswork out of food buying. They tell you what is inside packages. Read labels to get the quality of food you need for the use intended. When buying tomatoes for pizza pie, buy the lowest grade available. Grade C processed fruits and vegetables are a good buy for use in dishes where appearance or tenderness are not too important. Your store manager can tell you the quality of various brands.
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This circular was prepared by Jean A. Shipman, Extension Consumer Marketing Specialist, Oregon State University.