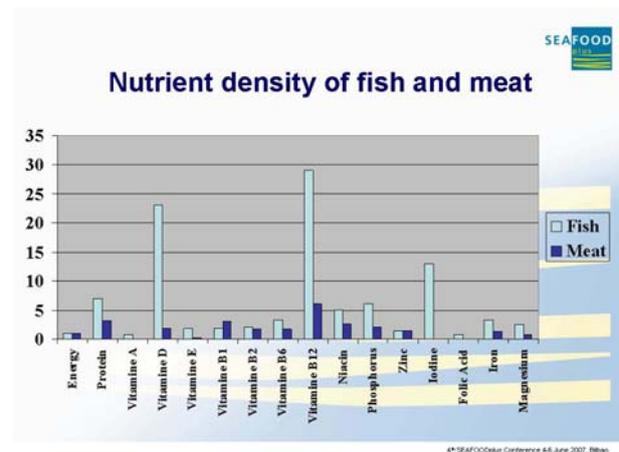
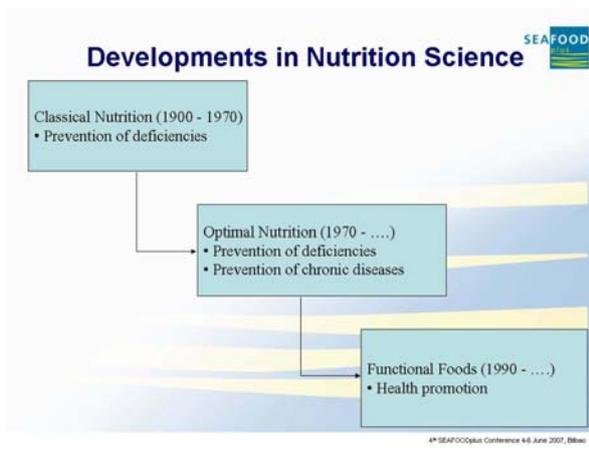


New EU regulation on Nutrition and Health claims; what does it mean for fish?

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Since the introduction in the western world of the concept of functional foods, the attention for the use of claims on food has increased sharply. Public health authorities and respected food companies realize that the use of claims on food might confuse and mislead consumers, when such claims are not substantiated by scientific evidence. Therefore in several European countries, for about 10 years, cooperation between consumer organisations, food companies and governments resulted in the formulation and use of codes of conduct, offering the food industry, on a voluntary basis, the opportunity to have evaluated by expert committees dossiers, presenting the scientific evidence for health claims on a particular functional food.

In December 2006 the European Parliament adopted a new European-wide legislation on claims on food (nutrition claims and health claims). The rationale of this legislation is that claims on foods will be allowed only when they comply with certain criteria. The basic underlying principle herein is that consumers should not be misled by claims and that claims should simply be true. The regulation will apply from 1 July 2007 and it concerns any message or representation, which is not mandatory under community or national legislation, including pictorial, graphic or symbolic representation, in any form, which states, suggests or implies that a food has particular characteristics. It will not be allowed to connect claims to foods that do not fulfil certain nutritional criteria. These so called nutrient profiles will be established by EFSA by January 2009. Moreover specific rules will be applied for the scientific substantiation of claims. A list of generally accepted claims is under construction. If a claim does not fall under this general list, normally product specific substantiation is requested. Some claims are prohibited: (1) those suggesting that health could be affected by not consuming the food, (2) claims making reference to the amount of weight loss and (3) claims which refer to recommendations to individual doctors or health professionals. What does this all mean for fish?

Like other basic foods in our diet, including whole meal bread, dairy products (milk, cheese), vegetables and fruits, fish has nutritional characteristics that could be communicated to consumers in the form of claims. Here we should not directly think of health claims, but merely on nutrition claims, giving information to the consumer about the contribution of the food to the intake of specific indispensable nutrients. For fish there are nutrition claim opportunities for the high-quality fish protein, for selenium, iodine, vitamins A and D, and particularly for the long-chain n-3 fatty acids. Generic health claims for fatty fish should be possible when it comes to heart health promotion.