



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

GHP – SECTION 8

PRODUCT INFORMATION AND CONSUMER AWARENESS

FAO Good Hygiene Practices (GHP) and
Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point
(HACCP) Toolbox for Food Safety

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(HACCP) Toolbox for Food Safety

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Technical note for readers

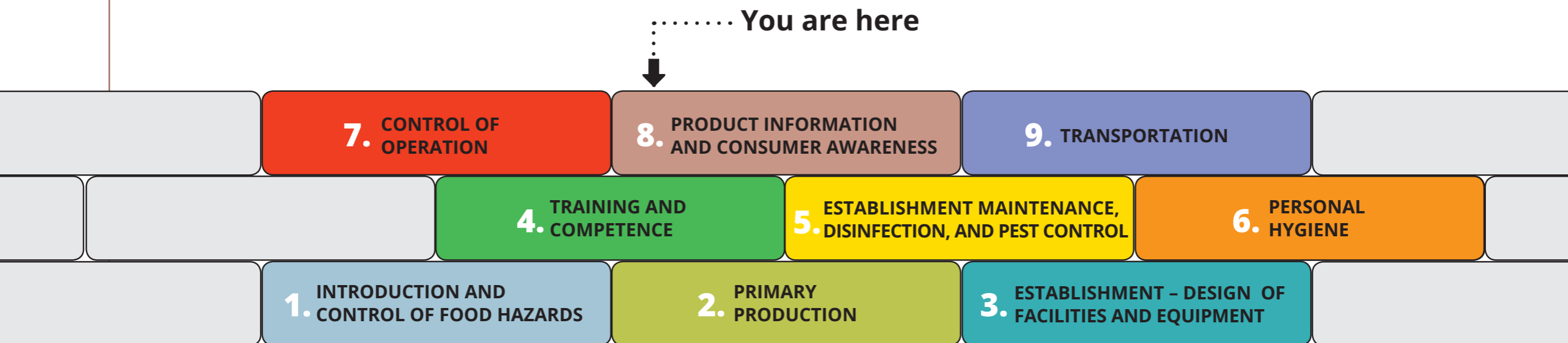
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SCOPE AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

This guidance document is part of a toolbox of materials and has been developed to provide users with a good understanding of Section 8, Product information and consumer awareness of the Codex General Principle of Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969).

Effective and well-established Good Hygiene Practices provide the foundation for food safety management systems. This tool divides the practices into nine sections, as illustrated by the brick schematic below. The section addressed by the current guidance document is indicated by the arrow.



CONTEXT

Product information, including allergen information, should be available on all food products to help the next operator in the chain of food businesses or the **consumer** to handle, prepare, display, store and/or use the product safely and correctly.

Food safety along the food business chain is ensured when the consumer has enough information to understand the product and to handle the food safely, as instructed. Educating consumers about the types of information on food product labels allows them to make informed choices and makes them aware of the need to follow product instructions to ensure that they prepare the food safely.

CONTEXT

Rationale

Insufficient **product information**, and/or inadequate knowledge of general food hygiene, can lead to products being mishandled at later stages in the food chain. Such mishandling can result in illness, or products becoming unsuitable for consumption, even where adequate hygiene control measures have been implemented earlier in the food chain. Insufficient product information about the allergens in food can also result in illness or potentially death for allergic consumers.

Learning objectives

This document on product information and consumer awareness provides guidance on:

- using lot or batch identification strategies to help with stock rotation and food recalls; and
- using product information and product labels to ensure proper handling and keeping food safe, and how information and labels allow consumers to make informed choices.

CONTEXT

Codex definitions:



Date of Manufacture: means the date on which the food becomes the product as described. This is not an indication of the durability of the product.

Date of Packaging: means the date on which the food is placed in the immediate container in which it will be ultimately sold. This is not an indication of the durability of the product.

Best Before Date or **Best Quality Before Date:** means the date which signifies the end of the period, under any stated storage conditions, during which the unopened product will remain fully marketable and will retain any specific qualities for which implied or express claims have been made. However, beyond the date the food may still be acceptable for consumption.

Use-by Date or **Expiration Date:** means the date which signifies the end of the period under any stated storage conditions, after which the product should not be sold or consumed due to safety and quality reasons.

Label: means any tag, brand, mark, pictorial or other descriptive matter, written, printed, stencilled, marked, embossed or impressed on, or attached to, a container of food.

cont.

CONTEXT

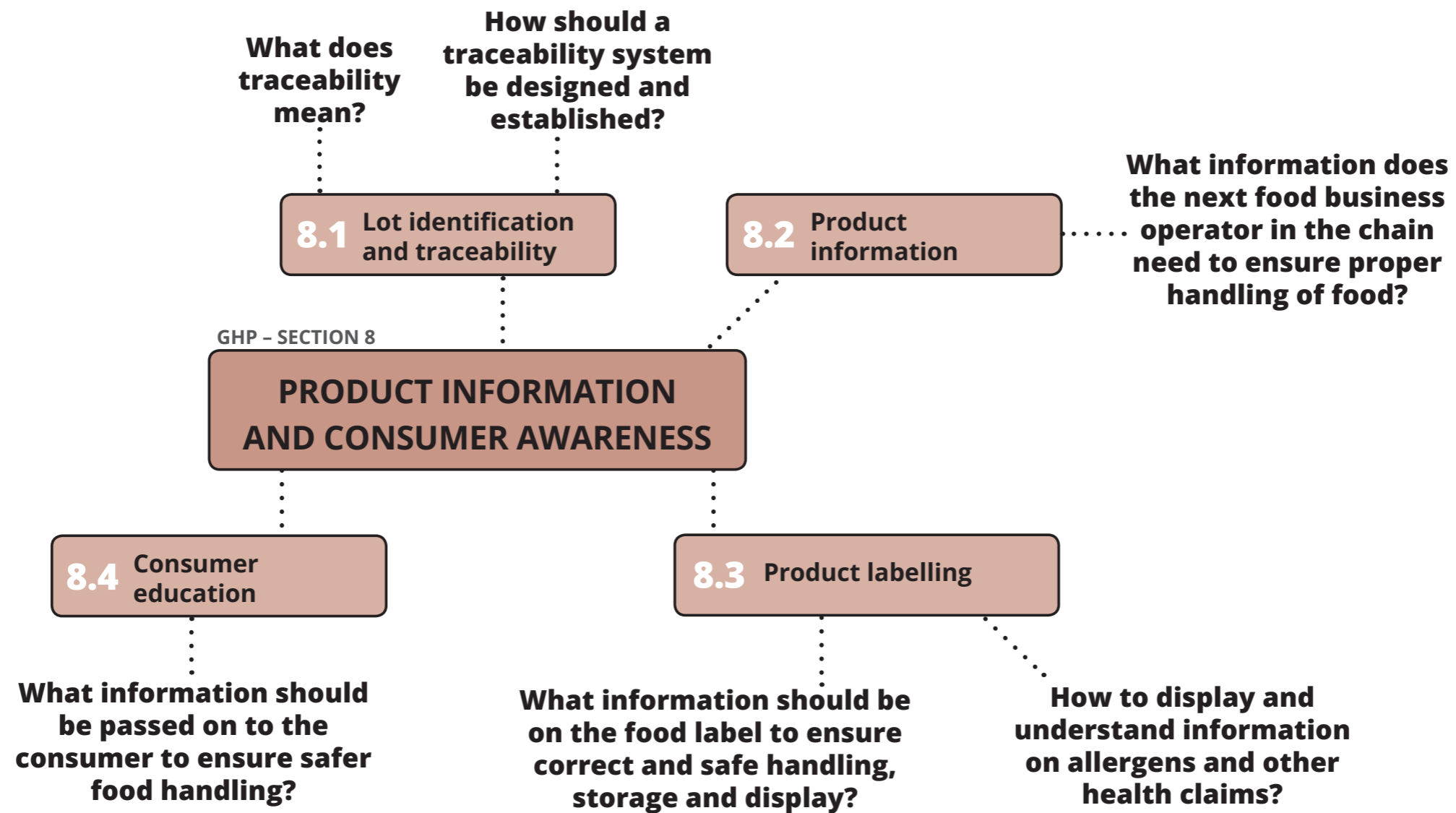
Labelling: includes any written, printed or graphic matter that is present on the label, accompanies the food, or is displayed near the food, including that for the purpose of promoting its sale or disposal.



Lot: means a definitive quantity of a commodity produced essentially under the same conditions.

MINDMAP

This section of the guidance is divided into sub-sections. You can jump to a particular sub-section by clicking on it, or return to this page at anytime by clicking on



8.1 LOT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

Using a “lot” as a unit for traceability

Lot identification and other identification strategies are essential for product recall and for effective stock rotation. Containers of food should be permanently marked to identify the producer and the lot where possible.

A lot refers to a quantity of product **produced together** showing **the same identifying characteristics** such as **production date** and **process parameters**.

8.1 LOT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

Defining and identifying a production lot

A lot code can provide an elegant way to define products manufactured under similar conditions (e.g. production date or time period, common equipment or raw materials). A lot code can consist of a series of number or letters that can be deciphered by the food business operator to identify specific products and can be used as a traceability unit.

A simple approach to defining a lot is to identify all products manufactured on a given production day with the same lot code or going one step further and using different lot codes for individual products.

For example, in the milling of flour, all packages of wheat flour milled on the same day would be labelled as lot A1 and all packages of maize flour milled on the same day would be labelled as lot A2. In this instance, the letter A would correspond to a particular production date and the number would correspond to a particular product.

8.1 LOT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

Using traceability as a tool to control food hazards

Traceability is the ability to follow the movement of a food through specified stage(s) of production, processing and distribution. It is applied in food control systems to:

- ➔ control food hazards;
- ➔ provide reliable product information; and
- ➔ guarantee product authenticity.

Applying traceability enables businesses to trace products within a food chain and protect consumers by linking consumer complaints to a particular lot of product and quickly and precisely identifying a product under review and recalling the product effectively if it must be withdrawn.

Tracing within a food control chain requires that each business:

- identify which products are, or are potentially, unsafe; and
- communicate to others (authorities, customers, consumers) which products have been identified as unsafe and need to be recalled.

8.1 LOT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

Food business operators should be able to identify the source and the spread of a given hazard, so traceability systems linked to lot codes should be available for particular sector of the food chain and be able to trace product one step back along the chain and trace food products one step forward in the food chain. These approaches help operators to identify immediate customers and suppliers and lead to an effective recall.

One step back (downstream tracing):

- refers to the ability to identify where products came from;
- investigates and rapidly establishes the source of the problem and resolves it; and
- prevents further occurrences and resumes production.

One step forward (upstream tracing):

- refers to the ability to establish where products have gone to;
- identifies and recalls contaminated and unsafe products; and
- minimizes the size of the recall.

8.1 LOT IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Movement of products during processing	Develop a lot identification system that can be applied to incoming raw materials and to finished products.
Traceability	Develop a traceability system in collaboration with suppliers and customers.
Recall	Document the nature and need of the recall, and how the recall system has been established and completed. This most likely will involve competent authorities, customers, etc.

8.2 PRODUCT INFORMATION

Insufficient product information and/or inadequate knowledge of food safety can lead to products being mishandled at later stages in the food chain. Such mishandling can result in illness or products becoming unsuitable for consumption, even where adequate food safety control measures have been taken earlier in the food chain.

Therefore, product information is necessary to:

- enable the next food business operator in the food chain to handle, prepare, display, store and/or use the product safely and correctly;
- easily identify and recall lots or batches of food, when necessary;
- provide consumers with enough information about the product so that they can make informed choices, especially those with food allergies; and
- prevent cross contamination of food products, temperature abuse or microbial spoilage due to improper storage and preparation.

8.2 PRODUCT INFORMATION

Communicating relevant food safety information

Certain information provided with the product can reduce the possibility of foodborne illness by ensuring the safe handling of food products by both food business operators and consumers. Such information may include, but not be limited to:

- date of production or manufacturing date;
- best before or use by date;
- lot number;
- storage temperature and conditions;
- cooking instructions; and
- presence of food allergens, religious considerations (i.e. halal) or if there are age restrictions (i.e. alcohol).

8.2 PRODUCT INFORMATION

Relevant food safety product information could be passed along to the next person in the chain by word-of-mouth, such as:

- seller to buyer at a vegetable market; or
- food server to customer in restaurants.

More often food safety product information is shared through written documentation, such as:

- where the seller guarantees information about a product;
- where the receiver checks incoming products against a list of specifications; or
- a product label providing information to the consumer.

Note: The product information will vary depending on whether it is addressed to food business operators or consumers.

8.2 PRODUCT INFORMATION

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Allergens	Ensure that allergens are properly labelled, including possible unintended allergen presences.
Date on product	Understand the different types of date makings used for food on product (e.g. best before date) and apply them accordingly.
Storage temperature and conditions	Provide recommended storage instructions when necessary to ensure the safety and suitability of the food throughout its shelf life.
Cooking directions or instructions	Provide recommended cooking and preparation instructions when necessary to ensure the safety and suitability of the food prior to consumption.

8.3 PRODUCT LABELLING

Prepackaged foods should be labelled with clear information to allow the next person in the food chain or the consumer to handle, display, store and use the product safely. Labelling should include information identifying food allergens used as ingredients in the product or situations where allergen cross-contamination cannot be excluded.

When foods are packaged in bags, boxes, bottles, cans and wrappers, the consumer cannot detect the quality and quantity of the food through their senses of sight, smell, taste and touch. This means that producers have information about the product that is not known to the consumer.

Food labels will help with the following:

- ➔ correct information asymmetry, where the seller has more information than the and buyer;
- ➔ inform consumers of the product identity, quantity and qualities, so they can make informed decisions;
- ➔ prevent misleading information and restrict the sale of food that is unfit and potentially harmful;
- ➔ inform consumers about contents they might need to avoid, and provide instructions for the proper storage and use of the product; and
- ➔ allow businesses to improve the marketing and competitiveness of products.

8.3 PRODUCT LABELLING

The labelling of prepackaged foods

The *Codex General Standards for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* (CXS 1-1985) are internationally recognized best practices and used as a basis for national policies and legislation.

The general principles:

- Prepackaged food shall not be described or presented on any label or in any labelling in a manner that is false, misleading or deceptive or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its character in any respect.
- Prepackaged food shall not be described or presented on any label or in any labelling by words, pictorial or other devices which refer to or are suggestive either directly or indirectly, of any other product with which such food might be confused, or in such a manner as to lead the purchaser or consumer to suppose that the food is connected with such other product.

8.3 PRODUCT LABELLING



Things to consider

- Food business operators should understand the mandatory labelling requirements for prepackaged foods.
- Food business operators should ensure that their labels are clear and not misleading to consumers.
- There are many ways that labels can mislead consumers, such as by omitting information. For example, if a fruit juice contains water and sugar as well as pure juice, but the producer uses a graphic image on the label and a name that could mislead a consumer to believe that the product is 100 percent pure juice.
- Various types of consumers (based on education, culture, language, advertising and personal experience) may interpret identical labels differently, and each label should be designed with consumers within a particular market in mind.
- Labels should be as simple as possible while not omitting any important information, such as allergens, cooking and storage instructions, if applicable.
- Labels should be made of food grade materials if they are in direct contact with food.

8.3 PRODUCT LABELLING

Format, language and legibility of food labels

The presentation of food label information is important. The information on the label should be useful, clear and not misleading. The following are general guiding principles to consider:

- A standard format to convey the same information is preferable to avoid confusion.
- Labels on packaged foods should not be separated from the container.
- Statements on the label should be clear, prominent, inedible and readily legible by the consumer.
- If the container is covered by a wrapper, the wrapper should carry the necessary information, or the label should be easily read through the outer wrapper.
- The name and net contents of the food should appear in a prominent position and in the same field of vision.
- The language should be acceptable to the intended consumer.
- The same labels can have the same information in different languages.
- If the language on the original label is not acceptable, a supplementary label containing the mandatory information in the required language may be used instead of re-labelling.
- Authorities should establish the font type, style and minimum font size as well as the use of upper- and lower-case letters to ensure legibility.
- Maintain a significant contrast between the text and the background so that the nutrition information is clearly legible.

8.3 PRODUCT LABELLING

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Food labelling	Labels should be clear and not misleading so that consumers can make informed choices.
Name of the food	Provide the specific name for a food rather than a generic name. The name provided should not mislead the consumer about the nature of the food.
Ingredients	Provide a clear list of all ingredients in descending order based on weight.
Allergens	Food and ingredients known to cause hypersensitivities should always be declared when present in prepackaged food products.
Clear labelling	The text should be legible, and the language used on labels should be that of the targeted customer.

8.4 CONSUMER EDUCATION

Consumers directly affect the safety of foods through their food handling and preparation practices. Several national and international reports have noted that poor hygienic practices in the home are responsible for between 30 and 40 percent of food-borne illnesses.

Many countries invest in educating and informing the public about food safety as an important means of reducing food-borne illnesses.

Public health and food safety authorities and consumer bodies should:

- design of public information/education programmes/campaigns, including monitoring their effectiveness;
- develop appropriate messages to use in programmes to facilitate behaviour change (handwashing, safe handling of raw products and water, temperature-time management during handling, proper storage practices, cross-contamination issues, proper cooking temperatures, etc.); and
- improve food hygiene practices in the food service sector (including street food).

Consumer education programmes should cover general food hygiene. Such programmes should enable consumers to understand the importance of any product label information and of following any instructions accompanying products, and to make informed choices.

8.4 CONSUMER EDUCATION

Communication between industry and consumers

It is essential that food businesses communicate with consumers about their products. This is often done through advertising and product promotions. Yet the most important means of communication is product labelling, which provides information on the product package or that accompanies the product at the point of purchase.

Labelling enables consumers to:

- make informed decisions;
- identify the manufacturer;
- make safe and effective use of the product;
- identify the contents, ingredients, health and safety features, and understand the preparation and storage information;
- understand the health benefits of food products; and
- learn about the nutritional aspects of the food product.

8.4 CONSUMER EDUCATION

Food business operators may also conduct other outreach programmes for consumers to provide useful information about food safety and nutrition. Brochures and other promotional literature, media campaigns and interaction with local government officials and schools are among the various methods used to educate consumers about food safety and nutrition.

Impacts of mislabelling

The accurate labelling of food products is important for ensuring food safety and suitability.

Inaccurate labelling can:

- prevent consumers from making informed choices when purchasing foods;
- pose a public health risk, such as an allergic reaction in a sensitive individual;
- cause foodborne illnesses as a result of incorrect cooking and storage instructions;
- cause foodborne illnesses because of incorrect best-before dates; and
- damage a food business's reputation, profit and revenues.

8.4 CONSUMER EDUCATION

FBO RESPONSIBILITIES



Topic	Examples of what you should do
Consumer education programmes	Support consumer education programmes to improve consumer awareness on the safe handling of food.
Food handling	Provide consumers with appropriate storage and cooking information to ensure the safety of the food, when necessary and include additional reminders such as proper handwashing to reduce incidents of food illness. Infographics, brochures or awareness programmes can be impactful. Consumers should also be proactive in learning all this information and practice it.
Avoid mislabeling	Perform due diligence in ensuring that products labels are accurate, that all labelling requirements are met, and that products are labelled with the correct label.

FIND OUT MORE



For additional information on the following topics related to this section, please consult the **Further reading** section accessible from the [SECTION LANDING PAGE](#).

How should a traceability system be designed and established?

What are the internationally recommended labelling requirements for prepackaged foods?

What foods or food ingredients are known to cause hypersensitivities and need to always be declared on pre-packaged food products?

How to display and understand information on allergens and other health claims?

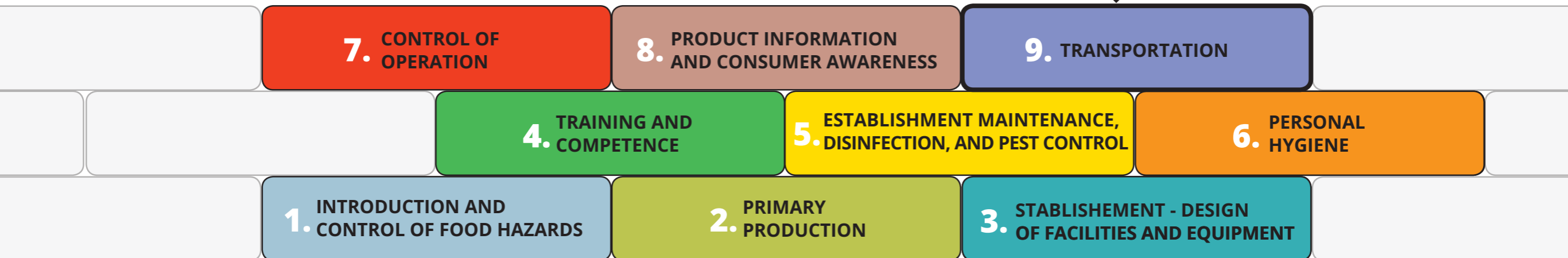
What information should be on the food label to ensure correct and safe handling, storage and display?

What is an example of a consumer education programme that supports the safe handling of food?

KEEP READING

The next section of the GHP toolbox is Transportation.
To continue reading, click on the highlighted brick below.

Click here for the
next section



FEEDBACK ON THIS GUIDANCE MATERIAL IS ALWAYS WELCOMED!

Please contact us at: food-quality@fao.org

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