

## Consumer Knowledge of Food Quality Assurance and Use of Food Labels in Trinidad, West Indies

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**Abstract :** Quality assurance and product labelling are vital in the food and drink industry, as a tactical tool in a competitive environment. The food label is a principal marketing tool which also serves as a regulatory mechanism in the safeguarding of consumer well-being. The objective of this study was to evaluate the level of consumers' use and understanding of food labeling information and knowledge pertaining to food quality assurance systems. The study population consisted of Trinidadian adults, who were over the age of 18 (n=384). Data collection was conducted via a self-administered questionnaire, which contained 31 questions, comprising of four sections: I. socio demographic information; II. food quality and quality assurance; III. use of Labeling information; and IV. laws and regulations. Sampling was conducted at six supermarkets, in five major regions of the country over a period of three weeks in 2014. The demographic profile of the shoppers revealed that majority was female (63.6%). The gender factor and those who were concerned about the nutrient content of their food, were predictive indicators of those who read food labels. Most (93.1%) read food labels before purchase, 15.4% 'always'; 32.5% 'most times' and 45.2% 'sometimes'. Some (42%) were often satisfied with the information presented on food labels, whilst 35.7% of consumers were unsatisfied. When the respondents were questioned on their familiarity with terms 'food quality' and 'food quality assurance', 21.3% of consumers replied positively - 'I have heard the terms and know a lot' whilst 37% were only 'somewhat familiar'. Consumers were mainly knowledgeable of the International Standard of Organization (ISO) (51.5%) and Good Agricultural Practices GAP (38%) as quality tools. Participants ranked 'nutritional information' as the number one labeling element that should be better presented, followed by 'allergy notes' and 'best before date'. Females were more inclined to read labels being the household shoppers. The shoppers would like better presentation of the food labelling information so as to guide their decision to purchase a product.

**Keywords :** food labels, food quality, nutrition, marketing, Trinidad, Tobago

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