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Nutri-Score Scores Again!

Dutch Government and Nestlé Next in Line to Promote Nutri-Score

Introduction

This was an important week for Nutri-Score. The Dutch government announced its support for Nutri-score and Nestlé indicated that it will put Nutri-Score on all food products in five European countries.

Nutri-Score – Highly Debated

We have discussed Nutri-Score extensively during the past year – here on this platform and also with clients. And we have a podcast on this topic lined up for release soon. Discussions about the Nutri-Score have led to some emotional responses, ranging from “at last, yes, we need this!” to “this is a horrible metric!” Our response to the latter comment is that, yes, there is much to discuss about the methodology for calculating the Nutri-Score, yes, the score occasionally provides rather strange outcomes, and yes, it does not take the entire diet of the consumer into account. But, and this is in response to the positive comments, currently the consumer does not have much to go on in terms of nutritional value of food, at least not in a concise, simple, easy way. Our position in this matter is discussed in more detail in an earlier [article](#).

Remind Me – What is Nutri-Score?

Nutri-Score is a front-of-pack label that aims to help consumers make healthier food choices. A Nutri-Score for a particular food item is given as one of five classification letters, with 'A' being a good, preferable score and 'E' being the lowest score. The calculation of the score involves eight different parameters of nutrient information per 100g of food – these are usually already available on food packaging. Contents high in fruits and vegetables, fibers, and protein promote a high score, while contents high in energy, sugar, saturated fatty acids, natrium, and sodium promote a low score. The Nutri-Score will be shown on the front of the packaging.

Nutri-Score to be Found in Many European Supermarkets

The reality is that Nutri-Score will be widely adopted in many European countries. This week there were two announcements in support of Nutri-Score, underlining the momentum it has.

First of all, support by governments for implementing Nutri-Score has been growing. Nutri-Score originated and was first adopted in France, in 2017. Belgium and Spain have followed suit. In October of this year, to the surprise of many and against the will of the food industry organisation, the German government also came out in support of Nutri-Score. And this week, the Dutch government announced its support, albeit in a Dutch, consensus-style fashion. A full decision on Nutri-Score will be made by 2021.

The second important announcement was by Nestlé. Nestlé came out stating that it will put Nutri-Score on all food products in five European countries; Belgium, France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. Other food companies, we know, are contemplating doing the same, putting a Nutri-Score front of pack. And in the end, these companies may have to, because governments will force them to, or the consumer will demand it.

... Or the retailer. The retailer is an important force in driving Nutri-Score to the front of pack. Both Aldi and Lidl are putting Nutri-Score on food products in Germany, forcing their suppliers to think about Nutri-Score. Delhaize in Belgium is taking matters even further. First of all, Delhaize claims that they stock the largest assortment of A and B products compared to other retailers in Belgium. Secondly, Delhaize trialled U-coins: a reward system that provides discounts to (currently a select group of) consumers who buy Nutri-Score A and B products. Sales of these products were up by 35% in the trial!

Food Companies Need to Act

Back to France, because this market has been using Nutri-Score for the longest period. Nielsen has looked into the effect of Nutri-Score labelling, and has found, albeit with a time period of only a year, that products with an A, B, or **E** outperform the market. The outperformance of products with an E score signals that consumers are interested in indulgence, and that the E score basically helps consumers selecting the worst, or in this case best, for the occasion. For food producers, this gap is interesting. For new food products to do well, they should be either healthy (validated by an A or B) or very indulgent, but not in between.

But we believe there is another effect also in play. We expect companies to look at the product portfolio of their direct competitors and try to achieve better scores for similar products. Products that are next to each other on the shelf will have a discernible letter on the front of the packs, potentially leading the consumer to make a different decision than in the past.

In the end, the European consumer will have another, important variable in the decision-making process, next to existing ones such as brand, price, and, not to forget, taste.

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