

Inventory of Food Product Terminology

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**Lexicon of Food Labelling Terminology
Academic Report and Research Findings**

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Introduction

In the summer of 2007, I met with Ian Attridge, Carol Andrews and Pat Learmonth of the Kawartha Heritage Conservancy. We wanted to discuss potential topics of research to investigate in a student research project. We came to consensus rapidly that there was a need to uncover the meanings behind various labels used on food products in order to empower consumers to make informed choices about their food purchases. The information necessary to uncover these meanings could be discovered using a variety of methods including personal interviews, site visits, review of regulatory material and other sources of terminology such as Marketing Boards. We foresaw opportunities for this research as a powerful consumer education tool that could be published in several formats and dispensed at various locations in order to be widely accessible. In particular, the publication of what we have since named *The Lexicon of Food Labelling Terminology* could impact the decisions of both consumers and producers with regards to food. We came up with the following research questions which have formed the basis of all further inquiries:

1. What terms are commonly used in the marketing of food and agriculture products in the Peterborough and Kawartha marketplace today and what are the meanings of these terms?
2. What additional terminology and explanations are available that could be used to increase transparency between consumers and sellers of food products?

Through the *Trent Centre for Community-Based Education* (TCCBE), we discovered that a similar project would be happening simultaneously, lead by the *Ontario Public Interest Research Group* (OPIRG). OPIRG groups from various universities throughout

the province have been responsible for the publication and maintenance of a document entitled *The Supermarket Tour*; a guiding manual for facilitators of educational tours of supermarkets. The tours aim to educate consumers with respect to the food industry. This year the task of reviewing and updating the document was taken on by Trent students working with OPIRG. This document seemed an appropriate place for the lexicon to be published, as an appendix. In addition, we saw potential for publication of the lexicon as a folding wallet-sized pamphlet, available for pick-up at various locations ranging from farmers' markets to the offices of various community organisations to, possibly, the grocery store itself. The lexicon could also be converted to poster format where it could be hung at the same locations described above. Cards or power point presentations could also be effective formats by which to present the information gathered in the formation of the lexicon. The formatting of the research is dependent on whether it is being presented to consumers or producers. For example, the manual may be uploaded to a website where farmers represent their practices to consumers interested in making informed choices with regards to local food purchases.

Background

Food culture has many implications for human life. It informs our cultural identities, affects our health, and has implications for the natural environment. Whether it impacts these things positively or negatively depends on the choices made by consumers, producers, regulators, and all the other players involved in the food industry. In recent history North Americans have come to regard food products with increasing suspicion. This trend has arisen in conjunction with the increase in pre-packaged foods, food imports and grocery stores, and the decreasing presence of the family farm. All of these trends have affected the ability of consumers to access information regarding food production and the food system in general. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that informed consumers tend to be less suspicious about the food products they purchase than those who are not. This hypothesis forms the basis of our belief in the need to provide consumers with the information required to make sense of the labels we are bombarded with each time we enter a grocery store or a farmers' market or arrive at the farm gate.

As grocery stores continue to dominate food sales, farmers are also affected adversely. Loss of direct sales to customers results in a loss of profit for farmers. This in turn damages local economies, particularly here in Peterborough county where agriculture is one of the foremost industries. Actions that have already been taken to address this issue include the creation of a new symbol to identify local farmers' markets as opposed to those that sell produce from outside the local area, including vendors who sell products from abroad. Figure 1 shows local farmers' market logo:



Figure 1: Logo identifying certified local farmers's markets.

Consumers may not be fully conscious of the way labelling informs food choices, yet marketers are spending large sums of money investigating the ways in which labelling can further their sales. For those shopping at places where they can access the food producer the need to know the legal definitions of various labelling terms is lesser, as the opportunity exists to simply ask. Therefore, the lexicon is mainly designed as a tool for the grocery store shopper, who tends to be the most prevalent type of food consumer. Perhaps, however, we can hope to change this, the lexicon potentially being one vessel to deliver the message that will bring about the necessary change. With access to even a basic understanding of food labelling, consumer food choices could be influenced. Keeping in mind that food choices affect human existence and the natural environment in such a variety of ways, consumers have a basic right to be informed.

The purpose of this project has been the creation of an inventory of terminology commonly used in the marketing of food products. The inventory aims to clarify the meanings of various terms for both producers and consumers and therefore to facilitate informed food purchasing in food stores as well as face to face with producers at farm gates and farmers markets.

Methodology

The first step to creating the lexicon was to compile a list of food labelling terms that most demanded explanation. The terms used to compile this list were gathered from the two farmers' markets here in the city of Peterborough, one of which is located downtown in Peterborough Square on Charlotte Street and takes place on Wednesday mornings, the other of which is located at the Memorial Centre on Lansdowne Street and takes place on Saturday mornings. I found labelling of food products to be fairly minimal at these venues. Next, I inventoried the two major grocery chains in the downtown core of the city of Peterborough; *the Price Chopper* and *No Frills*. These locations provided a wealth of cryptic food labelling terms that required explanation and provided the blueprint by which the lexicon was begun.

The aim of the lexicon is to find out the extent to which terms used in food labelling are regulated. In order to find the definitions required to build the lexicon it was necessary to know which governmental departments are responsible for legislating food labelling. This proved to be quite challenging without the assistance of a methodology within which to work. The following is a summary of the steps I took in my search for food labelling definitions:

- Contact the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) at the following address: ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca
- Inquire about finding more information regarding the meanings of terms used in food marketing and labelling.
- Under the direction of OMAFRA, based on the written response received from their representative, investigate the following website:

- <http://www.elaws.gov.on.ca/Browse?queryText=&resultCount=200&sortField=> , this is the E-laws website where acts pertaining to food and agriculture can be found by clicking on the first letter of the act for which you seek information (example: For food, click on ‘f’).
- Review the *Food and Drugs Act* as well as the *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*
- In addition, I received a link to the following OMAFRA web pages:
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/domestic/index.html>
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/export/index.html>
- By navigating through the above websites one will come to the following address:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/labeti/guide/toce.shtml>

This is the document where the bulk of the definitions are contained. It is called the *2003 Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising*, and is published by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). This is the governmental department which is responsible for regulating the use of most food labelling terms that are in fact regulated. Read this document in full.

Literature Summary

Food labelling in Canada is regulated via two pieces of legislation: the *Food and Drugs Act* and the *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*. Labels pertaining to policies regarding health and safety are under the jurisdiction of Health Canada; the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is responsible for all other labels. Other acts I reviewed in looking for the information necessary to answer the research questions included: the *Health of Animals Act*, the Canadian General Standards Board web page pertaining to organic agriculture, the Chicken Farmers of Ontario facts page regarding poultry production in Ontario, the Foodland Ontario historical information page, and the Health Canada page devoted to explaining the role and interpretation of nutritional labelling on food. Finding legitimate legal or regulatory definitions for the labels found on products, particularly in advertising (example: Natural) was quite difficult. This probably relates to the fact that many terms used in the advertisements of food products may not be regulated within any legal framework. For the terms contained within the *Lexicon of Food Labelling Terminology* most information was derived from the *2003 Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising*.

The *2003 Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising* is the document responsible for providing information regarding requirements for the use of terms used in food labelling and advertising. It also provides information about the policies which govern the use of statements and/or claims made with regards to food labelling and advertising (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). The document has a heading entitled “Reason for the 2003 Guide” where it is described as “a tool to assist industry in compliance with legislation and consumer protection” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). As the

primary source for information regarding food labelling it is a powerful indication of the current food system that this document is geared for industry use rather than use by consumers. In addition, in the course of this research it was interesting to observe how the list of terms I had originally compiled changed as I found which definitions were and were not available. Those that were not available are as follows:

1. Enriched
2. Farm-style
3. Free-range
4. Free-run eggs
5. Hormone-free
6. Meat protein (_%)
7. Non-hydrogenated (margarine)
8. Animal by-products
9. Ungassed (with reference to bananas)
10. Whole wheat
11. Whole grain
12. Whole grain whole wheat flour (including germ) [quoted from several ingredient lists]

The definitions found within the *Guide* pertain to the labels that are in fact regulated within the legislation described above; the *Food and Drugs Act* and the *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*. Therefore, the definitions that were not available via the *Guide* may not exist in any legal or regulatory sense. This indicates a need to provide a far more extensive regulatory framework by which to provide criterion for the use of food labelling terminology.

List of Terms Defined in *Lexicon of Food Labelling Terms*

1. **Product of Canada, Made in Canada:** These terms are used to indicate that part of the product in question was manufactured in Canada (not produced). Neither of these terms indicate that the food product was made from exclusively domestically produced ingredients (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
2. **Packaged in Canada:** This term is used to describe food that has been imported from elsewhere and packaged in Canada, however it does not provide information about the origins of the food itself (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
3. **Processed in Canada:** This term is used to describe a product which has ingredients that have been imported from elsewhere in bulk and then processed in Canada (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
4. **GMO-free:** There are currently no federal regulations or policies providing criteria for the use of “negative or positive genetically engineered claims in labelling or advertising” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
5. **Foodland Ontario:** With respect to the products that bear this label/symbol, its

- meaning is limited to the fact that the product was grown within the province of Ontario. The creation of the Foodland Ontario label is the result of a consumer promotion program funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, begun in 1977 (Foodland Ontario, 2007).
6. **Fresh:** The use of this term in food labels is regulated by the Food and Drugs Act and the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act. This term can be used to describe the nature of the product or can be used as part of a brand name. When used to describe the food product this term simply means that the food is not “canned, cured, dehydrated, frozen or otherwise processed or preserved” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
 7. **Natural:** Any food that has not been altered from its state at harvest can be described as natural. Products that cannot be described as natural are “foods or ingredients of foods submitted to processes that have significantly altered their original physical, chemical or biological state” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). Foods described as natural should not have added or removed materials. However, in the case of food additives, vitamins and mineral nutrients that are derived from natural sources, the product may be described as having ‘natural ingredients’ (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
 8. **Artificial flavours:** When found on the packaging of a food product, this term means that there has been an added flavouring ingredient that is “an imitation, artificial or simulated flavour” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
 9. **Kosher:** This term describes food products that have met the specifications of Jewish dietary laws. Use of this term, as well as any other related terms (ex.

letters from the Hebrew alphabet or any other representation suggesting that the product is kosher) in food labelling is restricted by the Food and Drugs Act to products that have met the requirements of the Kashruth (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). That the product has indeed met these requirements is certified “by a Rabbi or Rabbinical organization and identified by the appropriate Rabbi or Rabbinical organization symbol” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).

10. **Pure:** This term was specifically regulated in the Food and Drugs Acts before 1952, at which time its use was limited to products that did not have ingredients that were any of the following: “a compound, mixture, imitation or substitute” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). However, this criterion no longer applies to the use of this term in any legal or regulatory sense. (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
11. **100% pure:** With respect to reconstituted orange juice, this term can be used on the label if water has been the only ingredient added to the concentrate. This term cannot be used if other ingredients have been added. Examples include sugar, colour and vitamins (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
12. **Free:** In order for a product to be labelled as "free" from a particular ingredient, it must contain an amount per stated serving size small enough to be considered "nutritionally insignificant" by health experts (Health Canada, 2002).
13. **Cholesterol-free:** This label can be used on products containing less than 2mg of cholesterol and low saturated fat content per stated serving size. However, it does not necessarily imply a “low total fat content” (Health Canada, 2002).

14. **Trans-fat free:** Used for products containing 0.2g or less of trans fat per stated serving size per stated serving size (Canadian Food Inspection Agency , 2007).
15. **Low fat:** Used for products containing 3g or less of fat per stated serving size (Health Canada, 2002).
16. **Low in saturated fat:** containing a combined maximum of 2g of saturated and trans fat per stated serving size (Health Canada, 2002).
17. **Reduced:** This label means the product has a minimum of 25% less of a particular nutrient than a comparable product (Health Canada, 2002).
18. **Reduced Calories:** This label means the product has a minimum of 25% less energy than a comparable product (Health Canada, 2002). Health Canada (2002) states that this is "always associated with a significant amount".
19. **Source of fibre:** A label designated for products with a minimum of 2 grams of fibre content per stated serving size (Health Canada, 2002).
20. **Good source of calcium:** A label designated for products with a minimum of 165mg of calcium per stated serving size (Health Canada, 2002).
21. **Light:** "when referring to a nutritional characteristic of a product, it is allowed only on foods that are either 'reduced in fat' or 'reduced in energy'" (Health Canada, 2002).
22. **Home-made:** This term is used to describe a food that has not been prepared commercially and “does not require further preparation” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).

23. **Homemade Style, Home-style:** these terms are used in the description of food products that “may contain mixes, in whole or in part, from commercial or private recipes” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
24. **Unpasteurised:** A product (usually fruit juice, could refer to dairy products) that has not been treated "to eliminate disease-causing bacteria and could therefore be contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Cryptosporidium* and some viruses" (Canadian Food Inspection Agency B, 2007). Health Canada has a voluntary policy that asks producers of unpasteurised products to label them as such (Health Canada C, 2007).
25. **Grade # (Ontario/Canada):** Grading systems are established through both federal and provincial legislation, and apply to various food products including “butter, milk powder, eggs, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, honey, maple products and meat and poultry carcasses” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007). According to the legislation responsible for grading systems, “it is illegal to describe products by an improper grade designation or by any words or symbols that could be mistaken for a legally-established grade description” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
26. **Milk ingredients:** This label refers to products containing “butter, buttermilk, butter oil, milk fat, cream, milk, partly skimmed milk, skim milk and any other component of milk the chemical composition of which has not been altered and that exists in the food in the same chemical state in which it is found in milk” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).

27. **Modified Milk Ingredients:** This label refers to products containing “calcium-reduced skim milk (obtained by the ion-exchange process), casein, caseinates, cultured milk products, milk serum proteins, ultrafiltered milk, whey, whey butter, whey cream and any other component of milk the chemical state of which has been altered from that in which it is found in milk” (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2007).
28. **Grain-fed:** Chickens are exclusively grain fed. Chicken feed is a mix of various types of grain (usually wheat or corn) and various sources of protein (usually soybeans) in a ratio of 70:30.

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