

The project 'Process for the Assessment of Scientific Support for Claims on Foods (PASSCLAIM) builds on the principles defined within the previous EU project 'Functional Food Science in Europe' (FUFOSE). The main thrust of the FUFOSE Consensus Document was a scheme to base claims for functional foods on solid scientific evidence. FUFOSE suggested that any claim for 'enhanced function' and 'reduced risk of disease' should be scientifically justified. The FUFOSE conclusions and principles are now taken to the next logical stage, which is the identification of criteria to assess the scientific support of claims.

The PASSCLAIM document delivers criteria to assess the scientific support for claims on foods. It is a consensus document that has been borne of wide and intensive consultation among diverse stakeholders including academic experts, representatives of public interest groups, regulators, and the food industry. The set of criteria developed were derived through an iterative continuous improvement process that involved developing and evaluating criteria against key health claim areas of importance in Europe today. These areas included diet-related cardiovascular disease, bone health, physical performance and fitness, body-weight regulation, insulin sensitivity and diabetes risk, diet-related cancer, mental state and performance and gut health and immunity. Expert groups reviewed the availability of indicators of health and disease states within their respective areas of expertise. They have demonstrated the limitations of existing markers and have identified the need for better markers.

An important point that should be appreciated is that

the template for the evaluative process, in its present form as it emerges from the PASSCLAIM process, essentially provides only guidance. The template needs to be applied intelligently and sensitively on a case-by-case basis with respect both to gaps in knowledge and to the development of new knowledge. Thus there will still be a need for informed scientific advice in the regulatory process.

The PASSCLAIM approach to claims on foods and food components addresses consumers' concerns about misleading and unsubstantiated claims on foods and, when implemented, can contribute to a higher level of confidence among European consumers. The product(s) of PASSCLAIM, together with the forthcoming regulation relating to the draft proposal on nutrition and health claims made on foods, will facilitate that European consumers will benefit from an improved, harmonised approach to the scientific assessment and communication of claims on foods. By providing a scientific assessment framework that can be used throughout Europe, PASSCLAIM will not alone improve the credibility of claims for consumers but will also assist those making and regulating health claims.

In addition, by highlighting and establishing the status of markers that can be used to explore links between diet and health, PASSCLAIM has focused attention on future European research priority needs.

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