

A historical perspective of Canada's food regulations

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History is a tapestry woven by the threads of life. As *Food in Canada* magazine celebrates its 85th year, we reflect on the key events that have shaped our present. In 1942, Canada released its first food guide, known as 'Canada's Official Food Rules,' which became known as 'Canada's Food Guide' in 1961. The 2019 version saw significant changes, such as moving away from recommended serving sizes.

In the 1950s, Canadian food laws began transforming into the form we can recognize today. The *Food and Drugs Act* (*FDA*) came into force on July 1, 1954. This foundational food law would continue to evolve, particularly in the 1960's effort to modernize the governance of food additive, the repeal of voluntary fortification of wheat flour in mid-1970s and its reconsolidation in the 1980s. The most recent significant amendment occurred on Dec. 18, 2024, which, among other changes, repealed food standards and incorporated them by reference into the Canadian Food Compositional Standards.

Modernization efforts

The *Guide for Food Manufacturers and Advertisers* was introduced in 1961. It served an essential role for decades, broadening the understanding of food regulations. In 2014, the Guide was retired. However, a large part of it made its way into the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA's) web-based Industry Labelling Tool, where it continues to evolve.

Consumerism was perhaps the story of the 1970s. The *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act* (*CPLA*) came into force in 1974. It consolidated 15 labelling-related statutes. Metrication was a feature of these new rules. On Jan. 15, 2019, food regulations s were withdrawn from *CPLA* and assumed under the *Safe Food for Canadians Act and Regulations*.

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Federal laws challenged

The constitutional authority of federal food laws was challenged in the now infamous 2018 'Free the Beer' case when Canada's breweries convinced the Supreme Court the federal government had no authority to enforce standards, as beer couldn't be sold across provincial borders.

Labelling laws

Perhaps the most significant event in the 1990s, other than the pent-up fears of Y2K, was CFIA's creation in 1997. This consolidated the inspection and enforcement activities of several federal departments, such as those under Health Canada, Fisheries and Oceans and Agriculture Agri-Food Canada. The various commodity laws were not consolidated until 2019, when *Safe Food for Canadians Act* (*SFCA*) came into force.

The new millennium began with one of the most significant changes to food labelling in Canada in decades—the introduction of mandatory nutrition labelling in 2002. The level of prescription of these rules has set the tone for subsequent rules including those in 2016 that revised ingredient labelling and updated nutrition labelling. Its influence on front of package nutrition symbol labelling (sugars, sodium and saturated fat), introduced in 2022 and will be implemented in 2026, is also apparent. In 2022, new supplemented food regulations also came into force. These rules provide for discretionary addition of supplemental ingredients to foods, including certain vitamins, minerals, amino acids and other substances such as caffeine.

In 2011, *FDR* was amended to require foods to be labelled for priority food allergens, gluten sources and sulphites. In 2012, *FDA* was amended to provide for the creation of marketing authorizations (MAs), which were then used to modernize the governance of food additives. Fifteen food additive tables were set up. These were incorporated by reference under their corresponding MA. These MAs were repealed in Feb. 2025 following the incorporation by reference of and the updating of food additive tables on Dec. 18, 2024.

History's threads that are woven through time connect the past to the present. It should also be obvious that change does not occur quickly. While we are currently in a dynamic period of regulatory change, those are the results of past efforts. Currently, CFIA is considering the modernization of outdated food standards. There are also proposed regulations on enhanced food labelling from 2019 that CFIA will one day consider reintroducing. They targeted modernizing best before dates, the presentation of information on labels, flavour and highlighting ingredient labelling, among other things. CFIA has in the past also been thinking of revising its guidance on 'Product of Canada' and 'Made in Canada' claims. Perhaps this might become a front burner due to the current trade war with the U.S.

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