The French Observatory of Food Quality (Oqali) was set up in February 2008 by the Ministries in charge of Agriculture, Health and Consumer Affairs. It was created as part of the French National Nutrition and Health Programme 2006-2010 (PNNS 2), a nutrition-based programme aimed at improving public health. Oqali is financed and supervised by the 3 ministries. The implementation is entrusted to INRA (French National Institute for Agronomic Research) and Afssa (French Food Safety Agency).

The primary goal of Oqali is to monitor the global changes in the food supply by measuring differences and trends in the nutrient content of processed and packaged foodstuffs in relation to economic parameters in the French market.

Oqali also provides tools to assess the efforts made by the food chain to improve nutritional quality. The Observatory collaborates with manufacturers and retailers in the food chain. This partnership facilitates the collection of information and is important for the validation of the scientific methods used to analyse the data.

Oqali database contains data going back to 2001 on about 4000 food products. In 2008 data analyzed on more than 2000 food products. Many product groups monitored every year. Annual reports.

Methodology

For each category and type of brand, Oqali has analyzed all the collected information to describe products characteristics: nutritional values have been cross-referenced with economic data provided by consumer panels. Packaging related-data was also analyzed. The anonymity of collected data is always preserved. The main types of studies are box-plots, two-way scatterplots and multivariate statistics.

Results

Oqali has published different reports, available online (www.oqali.fr), presenting the main results obtained by the data processing. In the product groups studied, differences in the nutritional composition are essentially related to the classification into categories. Within a category of products, there are differences in the nutritional composition depending on the type of brand. However, these are isolated differences (related to a small number of products) and should not be considered as systematic (the type of brand classification according to the average nutrient content differs from one category to another). In addition, the nutritional information available on packaging is less complete for best-value items (diagrams 3-10).

Conclusions and Perspectives

In conclusion, the nutrient content mainly differs according to categories of products and differences between types of brands are not systematic. The results published by Oqali are an essential tool to meet public health challenges and consumer expectations on nutritional information.

This approach is continuously expanded to include additional product groups: pre-packed meat products; jams, stewed and preserved. The main types of studies are box-plots, two-way scatterplots and multivariate statistics.