



NUTRITION INFORMATION ON FRENCH FOOD LABELS

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Introduction

The French Observatory of Food Quality (OQALI), set up in 2008 by the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Consumer Affairs, is managed by both ANSES (French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety) and INRA (French National Institute for Agricultural Research).

Its purpose is to **centralize, at the branded product level, all nutritional data provided on labels** (e.g. nutritional composition, claims) and socio-economic parameters (average prices, market shares and consumption levels) in order to monitor processed food supply, in France.

Methods

Data collection:

Working groups were implemented with the main food chain operators, according to food categories, to optimize data collection, define indicators and harmonize food classification.

Agreements with manufacturers and retailers ruled the provision of labelling information on the food packagings and allowed OQALI staff to take pictures of the products on shelves.

Market shares were also collected from consumer panels, to assess the OQALI data representativeness in respect to the whole products, available on the French market.

Nutrition information monitoring:

All nutrition data on labels were collected in the branded products OQALI database^a: nutrition labelling stating the Big 4 or Big 8 (4 or 8 nutrient values), nutrition labelling schemes (e.g. the GDA or Traffic Light systems), nutrition and health claims, consumption advice, and serving sizes.

Nutrition parameter frequencies were computed by food category.

Variability of nutrient contents as labelled was also analysed^b to identify possible improvements.

Results

More than 20,000 food items from 18 food categories were collected covering between 30% (Fresh deli products) and 78% (Soft drinks) of each category market.

Presence of nutrition labelling on French food products

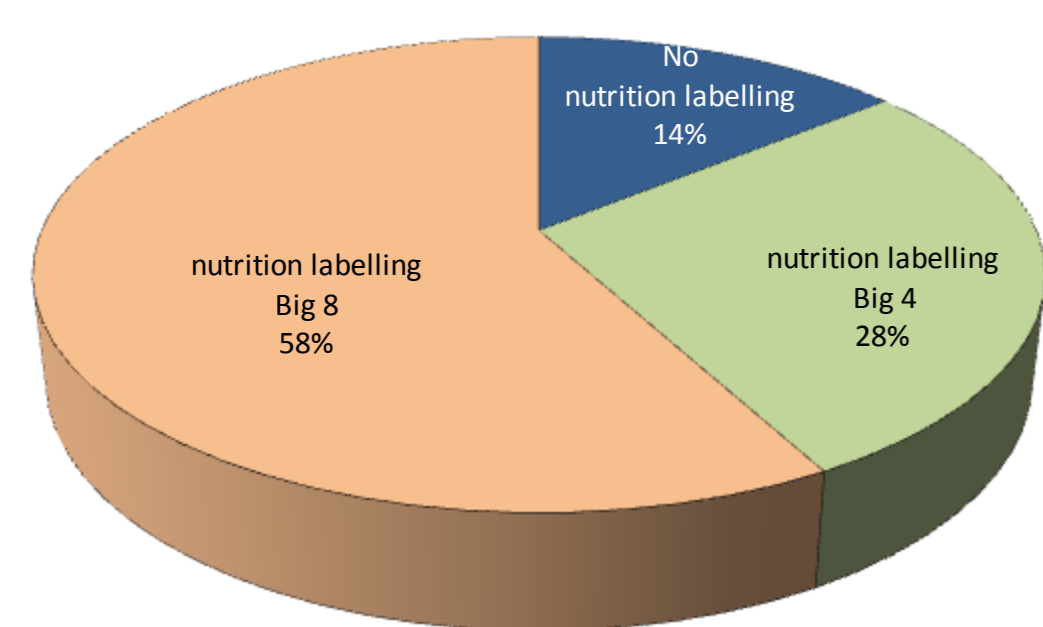


Figure 1: Nutrition labelling frequency

On average, nutrition labelling was provided on 86% of studied products (Figure 1) with: 58% of Big 8 and 28% of Big 4.

Presence and type of nutrition labelling depend on the food categories (Figure 2).

Big 8 is more often provided on:

- Breakfast cereals (90%)
- Apple sauces and fruit purees (79%)
- Soft drinks (75%)
- Fruit juices and nectars (73%)

Lack of nutrition labelling is most often encountered on:

- Jams (48%)
- Canned Fruits (33%)
- Drink syrups (to dilute with water) (28%)
- Delicatessen meats (23%)

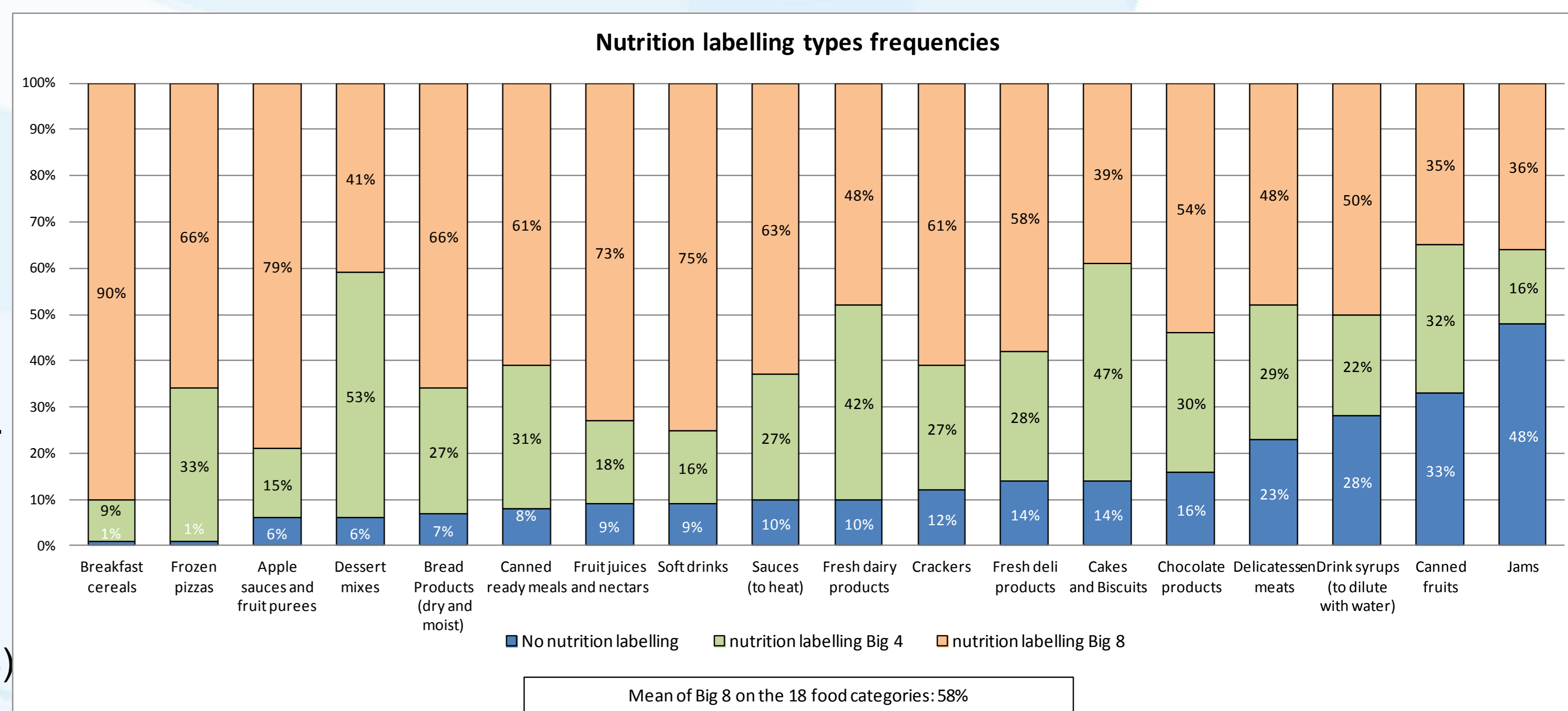


Figure 2: Nutrition labelling frequency by food categories

The frequency of other nutrition information depends also of the food categories (Figure 3).

Nutrition labelling schemes were displayed on 37% of products: from 5% for Jams to 75% for Frozen pizzas.

20% of products provided a nutrition claim, with the proportion rising from 1% for Sauces (to heat) to 70% for Apple sauces and fruit purees.

20% offered consumption advice on their label: from 1% for Jams to 88% for Breakfast cereals.

48% of products indicated a serving size: between 8% for Jams and 72% for Fresh deli products.

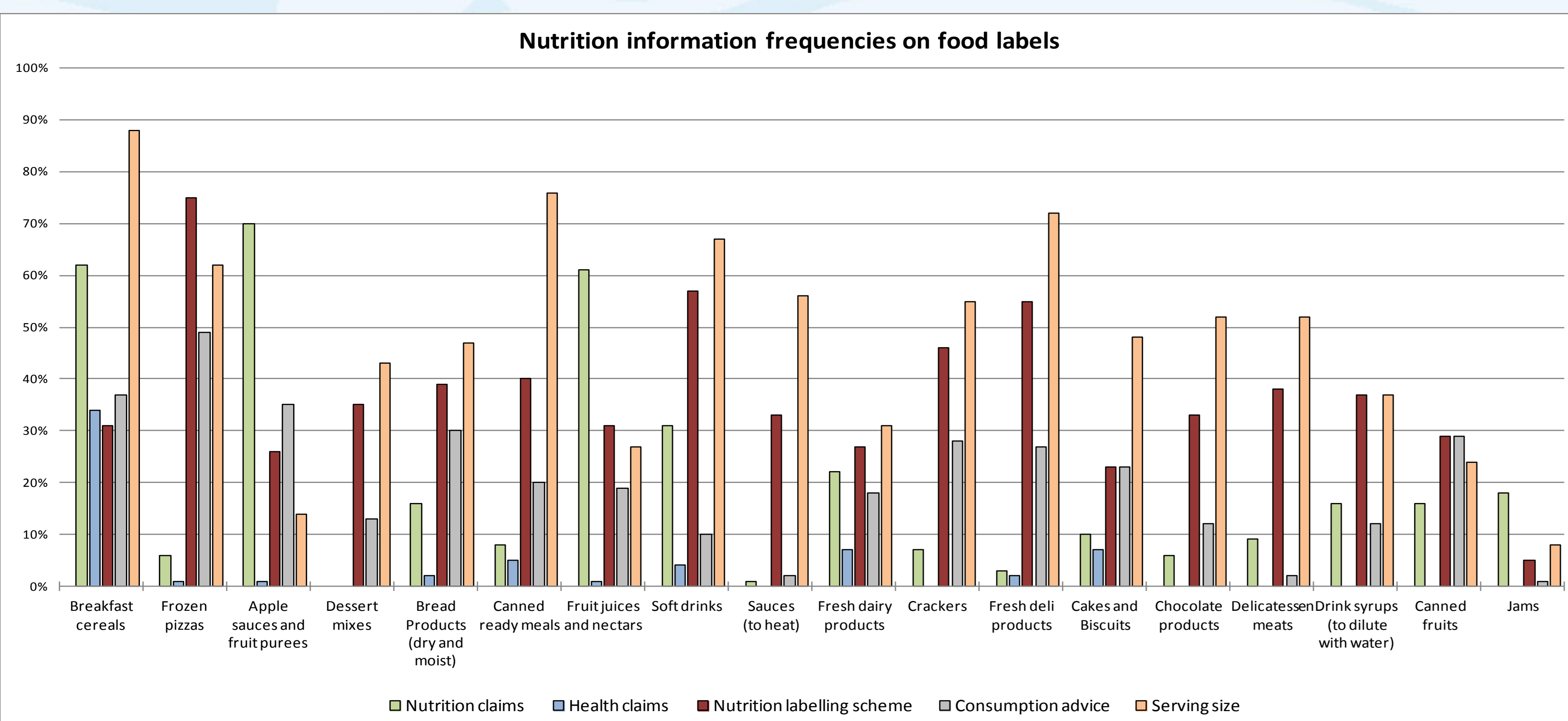


Figure 3: Nutrition parameter frequency by food categories

Conclusion

The quantity and quality of nutrition information provided on French product labels differ among food categories but are quite similar to those of other European countries^c. Further OQALI studies are needed to follow these parameter frequencies over time. A better knowledge of the impact of these different parameters on consumer choice is also required to determine which is the most effective.

^a Menard, C., Dumas, C., Goglia, R., Spiteri, M., Gillot, N., Combris, P., Ireland, J., Soler, L.G., Volatier, J.L. OQALI: A French database on processed foods. (2011) *Journal of Food composition and analyses*, 24:744-749

^b Menard, C., Dumas, C., Gillot, N., Laurent, L., Labarbe, B., Ireland, J., Volatier, J.L. The French OQALI survey on dairy products: comparison of nutrient contents and other nutrition information on labels among types of brands. *Journal of Human nutrition and Dietetic*, Accepted

^c Projet FLABEL (www.flabel.org) - S Storcksdieck genannt Bonsmann et al., Penetration of nutrition information on food labels across the EU-27 plus Turkey, *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2010), 1-7.