

The French Observatory of Food Quality (Oqali)

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BACKGROUND/AIMS

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

The Observatory records the available nutritional and economic data on processed foodstuffs in a database. The information is gathered for each specific foodstuff.

Oqali database, using MySQL language, is designed to monitor any changes on products. Each product is described using all the information appearing on the packaging, by means of several tables (diagram 1). Each time a new element appears on the packaging a new product is created in the database.

Teams of Oqali, located in two different places in France, can update this database simultaneously via one secured Internet access. At the end of 2009, manufacturers, who provided data, will be able to retrieve them via their own confidential Internet access.

To collect nutritional data, Oqali uses information provided by manufacturers and retailers, information available to consumers (on the packaging) and nutrient analyses, when information is missing. Economic parameters are obtained from surveys and panels data on French food consumption and food purchases.

Data concerning different groups of food products has already been collected in 2008: breakfast cereals, sweet biscuits and fresh dairy products (diagram 2).

Diagram 1: OQALI DATABASE

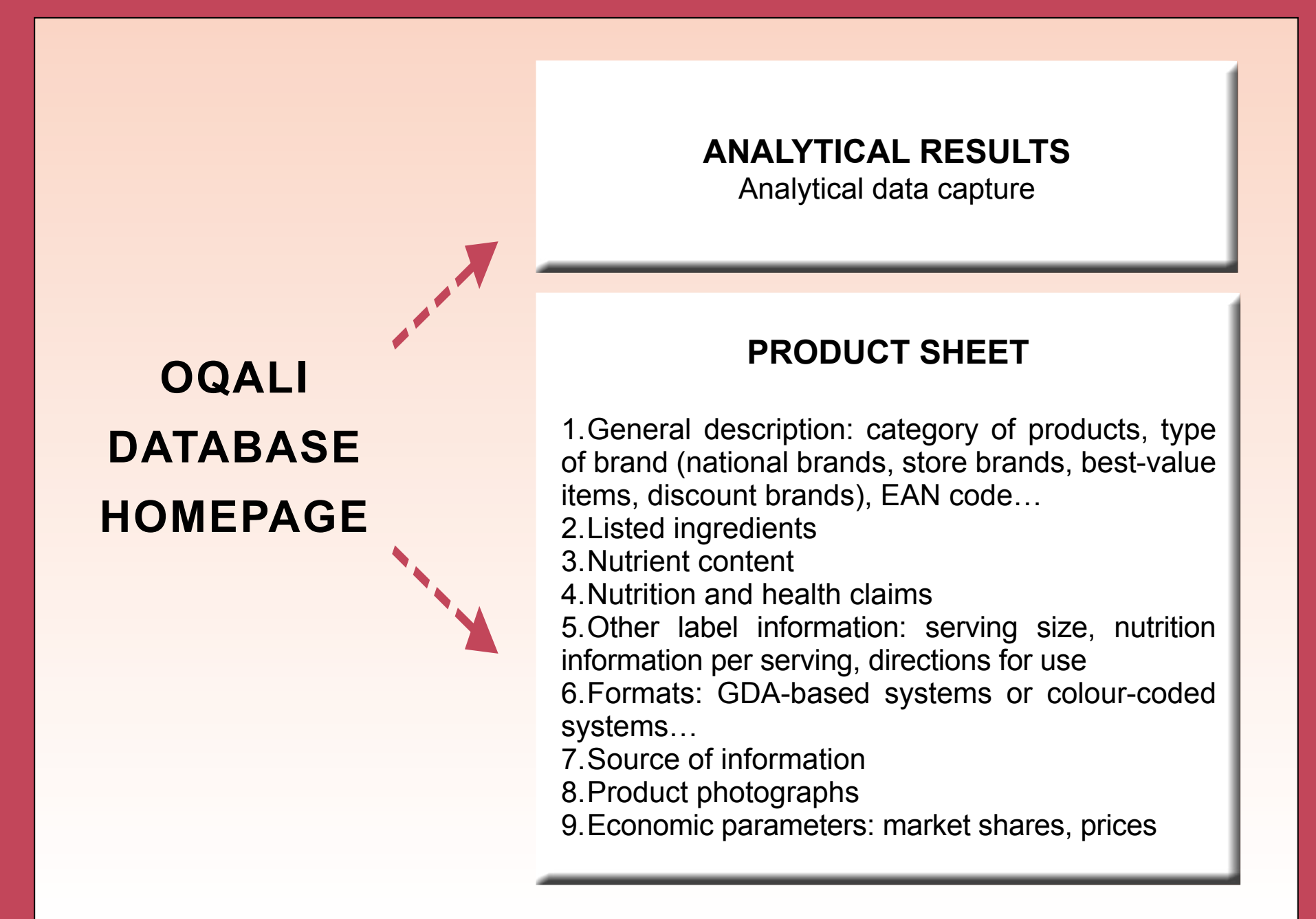


Diagram 2: DATA AVAILABLE

2008	Breakfast cereals	Sweet biscuits	Fresh dairy products
Data available (number of products)	355	1118	707
Categories of products (number)	10	27	7
Market coverage (according to TNS Worldpanel data on French household purchases)	75.5% (TNS 2008)	44.6% (TNS 2008)	80% for each food product studied (TNS 2004)
Studies	Nutrient content: nutrition information on labels Purchasing data Food labelling	Nutrient content: nutrition information on labels Purchasing data Food labelling	Nutrient content: nutrition information on labels, analytical data and comparison between them Food labelling
Retrospective data (number of products)	153	269	-

HIGHLIGHTS

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

Web site: www.oqali.fr

METHODS

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, twoway scatterplots and multivariate statistics.

MAIN 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).

Diagrams 4-7: CATEGORIES OF PRODUCTS TWO-WAY SCATTERS

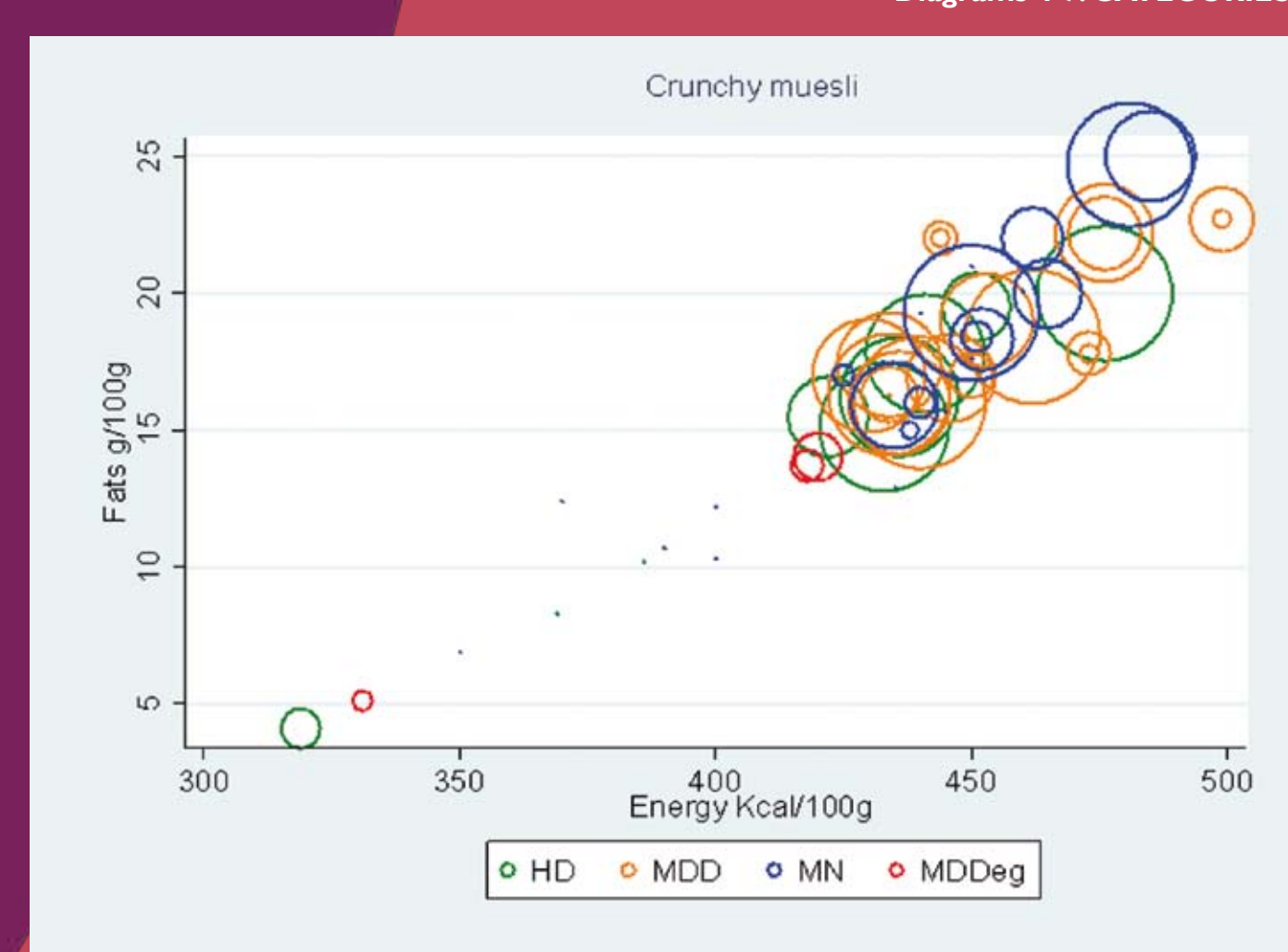


Diagram 4: Energy/fats - Crunchy muesli

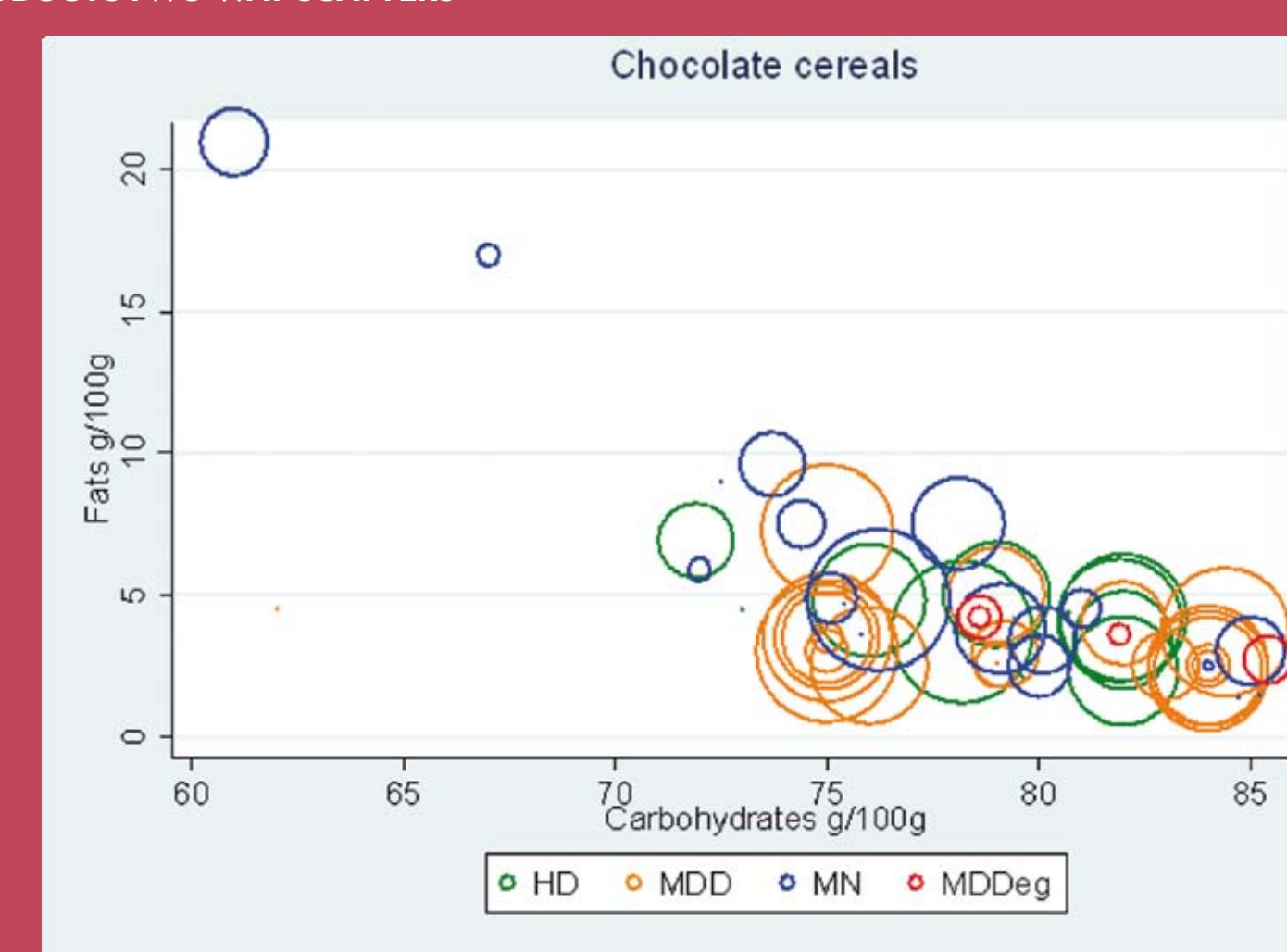


Diagram 5: Carbohydrates/fats - Chocolate cereals

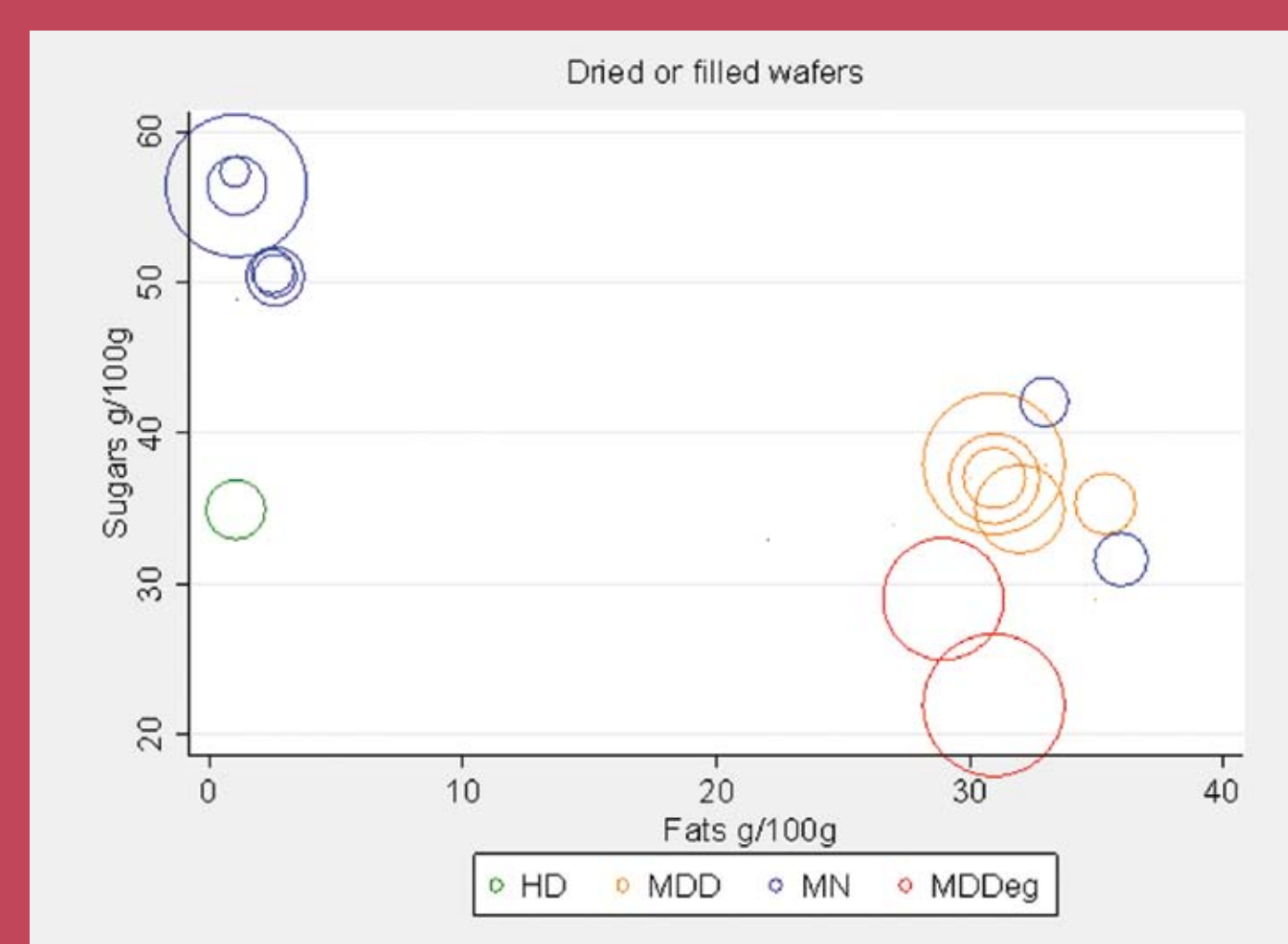


Diagram 6: Fats/sugars - Dried or filled wafers

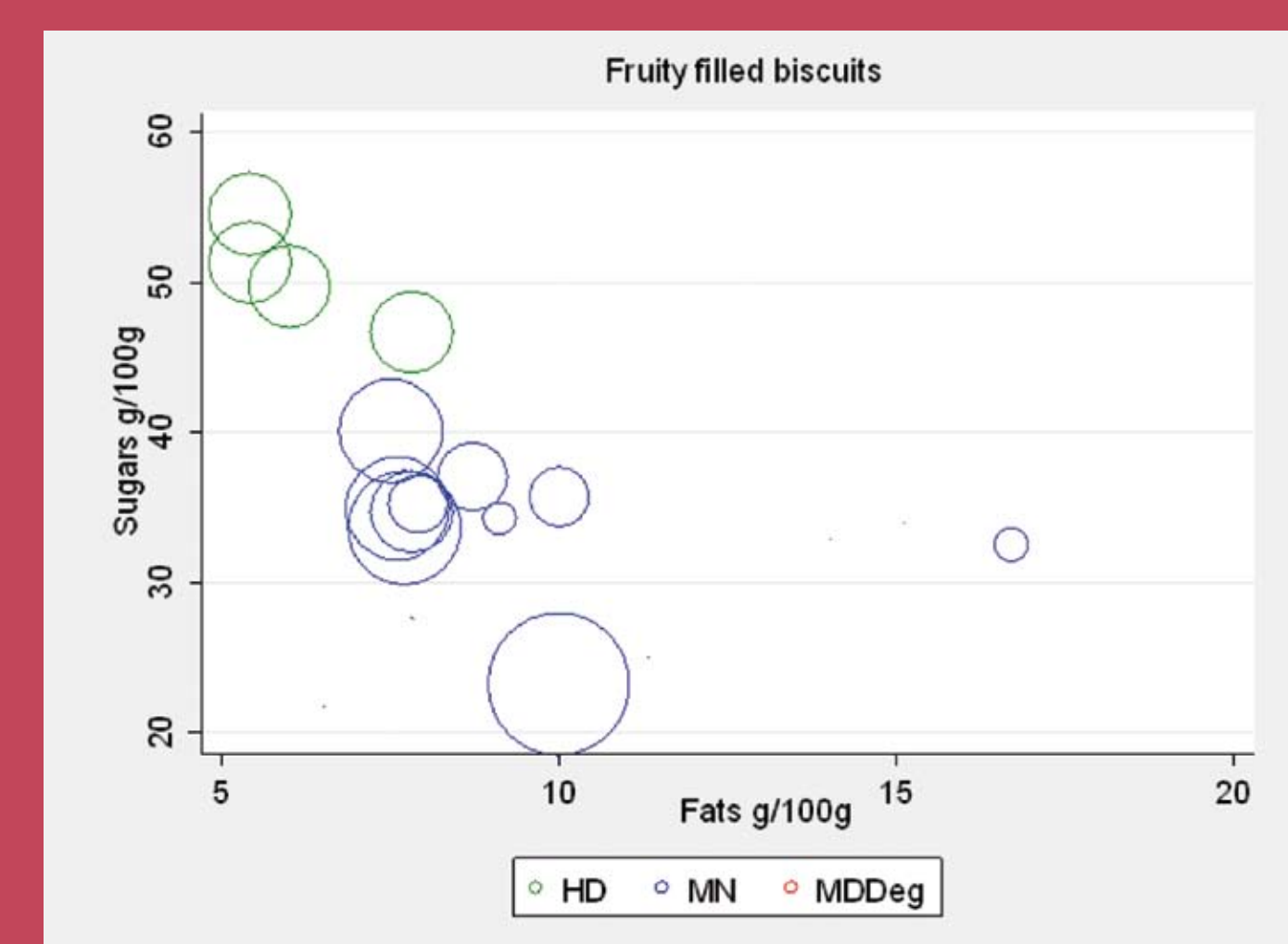


Diagram 7: Fats/sugars - Fruity filled biscuits

Diagrams 8-9: CATEGORY OF PRODUCTS AND TYPE OF BRAND BOX-PLOT

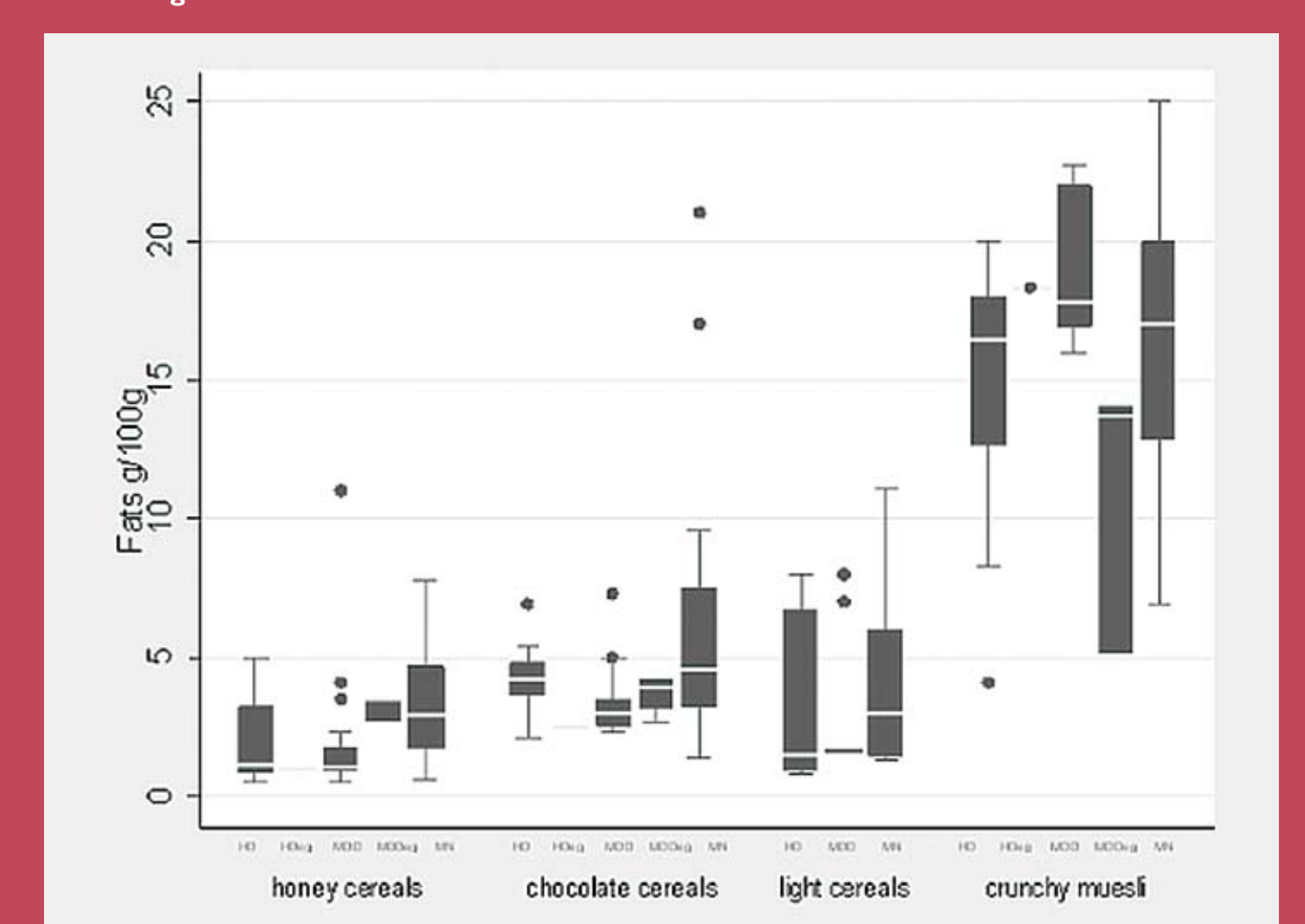


Diagram 8: Fats

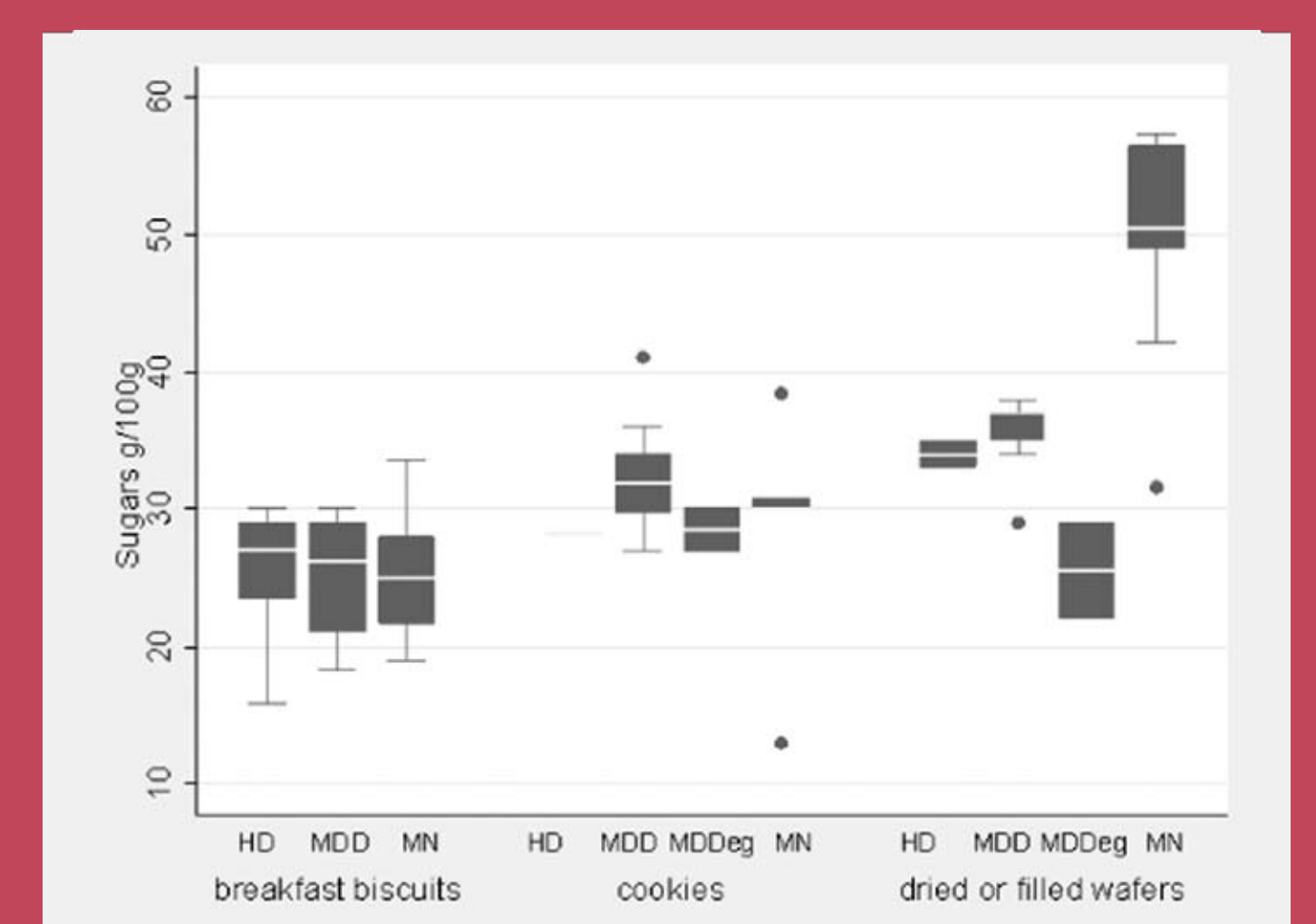
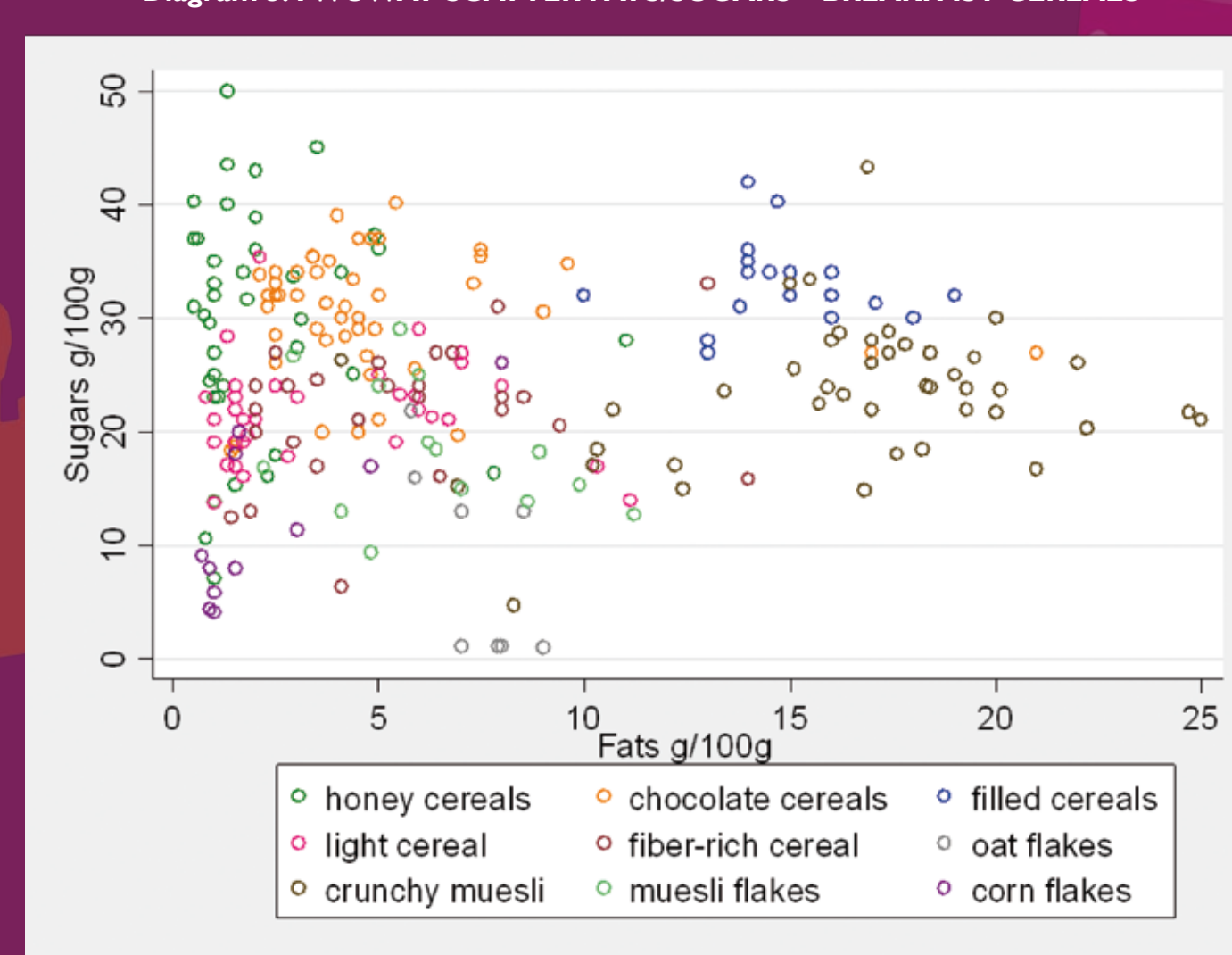


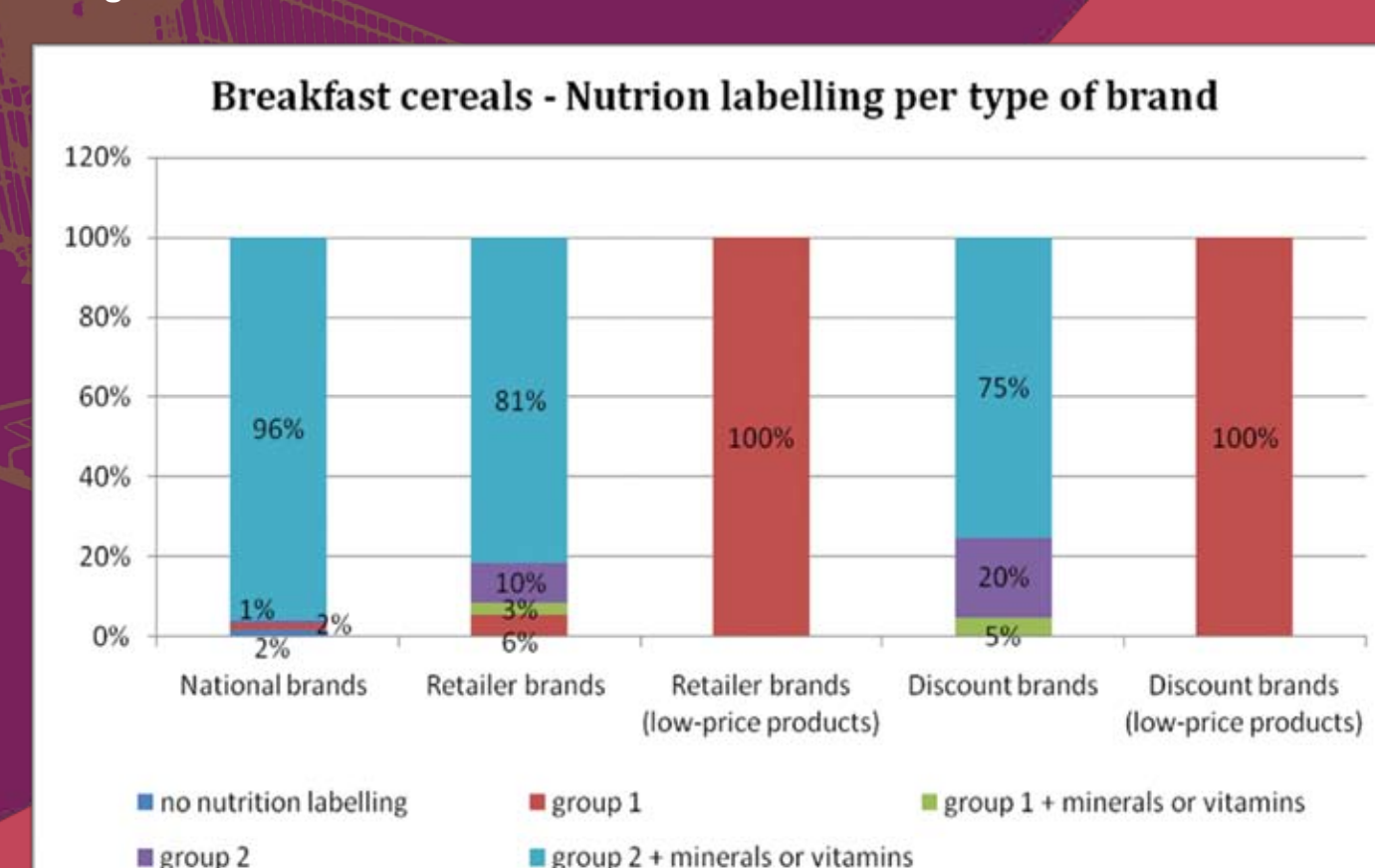
Diagram 9: Sugars

Diagram 3: TWOWAY SCATTER FATS/SUGARS - BREAKFAST CEREALS



Nutrient content mainly differs according to categories of products.

Diagram 10: BREAKFAST CEREALS - NUTRITION LABELLING PER TYPE OF BRAND



Nutritional information available on packaging is less complete for low price products (retailer and discount brands).

Differences of nutrient content between types of brands are not systematic.

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 canned fruits; juices and soft drinks; chocolate and chocolate-based products; prepared meals (chilled, frozen and canned); crackers and cocktail biscuits; bread-based products.