

Letter to the Editor

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An update on the status of front-of-package labelling regulations in Latin America

Madam

I have read with considerable interest the original research paper by Freire *et al.* regarding the Ecuadorian experience using the traffic light food labelling system⁽¹⁾. It is well known that Latin America has experienced nutritional transitions that have influenced the increased prevalence of overweight and obesity⁽²⁾. However, the progress of nutritional labelling – especially front-of-package (FOP) labelling, as a tool to fight these diseases – has been slow⁽³⁾. The discussion in Latin America is open, and some countries, like Ecuador, have already launched the development, implementation and monitoring of FOP initiatives⁽¹⁾. On the other hand, other countries are still in disadvantage, like Venezuela or Peru, where even the declaration of a nutritional label is still voluntary⁽⁴⁾.

Motivated by Freire *et al.*'s paper, I have summarized the local scene on healthy eating and FOP labelling policies in ten Latin American countries (Table 1). All of them have healthy eating laws or regulations. Only four countries (Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Mexico) have established formal guidelines for FOP labelling under

the scope of laws promoting healthy eating. Ecuador and Bolivia have adopted the traffic light system, Mexico and Peru the Guideline Daily Amount system, and Chile its own system based on a hexagon-warning label. Peru is the only one that has FOP guidelines, but the declaration of them is still voluntary. I found no information on FOP labelling regulations for the other countries.

The Ecuadorian experience deserves special recognition due to the progress made so far and for the evidence collected about the contribution of FOP labelling in lowering the consumption of ultra-processed foods with high levels of fat, sugar and salt⁽¹⁾. It is the concern of every Latin American country to set policies that include the FOP labelling topic. Countries could even discuss the creation or adoption of one unique model for the entire region, in order to reduce the inconsistencies between labelling requirements^(3,5) and trade barriers⁽⁶⁾.

However, future research considering the potential role of different FOP systems in the behaviour, comprehension and purchase practices in Latin American countries is needed, especially in nutritionally at-risk populations⁽⁷⁾. Encouraging the early implementation and regulation of these labelling systems can definitely contribute to decrease overweight and obesity rates⁽³⁾.

Table 1 Overview of front-of-package (FOP) labelling status in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela

| Country | Are there guidelines to promote healthy eating? | Are there guidelines for FOP labelling? | Is the declaration of FOP labelling mandatory? | FOP system adopted | Year of implementation of FOP declaration |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Argentina ⁽⁸⁾ | Yes: Resolution No. 1083/09 (Dec 2009) | No | No | None | – |
| Bolivia ⁽⁹⁾ | Yes: Law No. 775 (Jan 2016) | Yes: Law No. 775 (Jan 2016) | Yes | Traffic lights | Jan 2017 |
| Brazil ⁽¹⁰⁾ | Yes: Decree 8-553 (Nov 2015) | No | No | None | – |
| Chile ⁽¹¹⁾ | Yes: Law No. 20-606 (Jul 2012) | Yes: Law 'Super 8' (Jun 2015) | Yes | Hexagon-warning label (Stop logo) | Jun 2016 |
| Colombia ⁽¹²⁾ | Yes: Law 1355 (Oct 2009) and Public Health Plan 2012–2021 (Mar 2013) | No | No | None | – |
| Costa Rica ⁽¹³⁾ | Yes: National Policy on Food Security and Nutrition 2011–2021 (May 2011) and Executive Order No. 36910 (Nov 2011) | No | No | None | – |
| Ecuador ⁽¹⁴⁾ | Yes: Executive Order No. 1395 (Oct 2008) | Yes: Official Register No. 318 (Aug 2014) | Yes | Traffic lights | May 2014 |
| Mexico ⁽¹⁵⁾ | Yes: National Strategy (Sep 2013) | Yes: Guidelines in nutritional labelling and nutrimental distinctive (Apr 2014) | Yes | Guideline Daily Amount | Jul 2015 |
| Peru ⁽¹⁶⁾ | Yes: Law No. 30021 (May 2013) and R.M 524-2016/MINSA (Jul 2016) | Yes: Peruvian Guide 25-2014 (Dec 2014) | No | Guideline Daily Amount | Not defined. Voluntary |
| Venezuela ⁽¹⁷⁾ | Yes: Strategy in addressing overweight and obesity (2013) | No | No | None | – |

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