

## Food Health and Safety Symbol in Iran

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**Abstract:** Creating a competitive atmosphere for evaluating the domestic food products and granting the Health and Safety Symbol in order to improve the quality of products and reduce the consumption of harmful ingredients and this will secure the goals of the Ministry of Health for encouraging the producers to provide healthier brands.

**Key words:** Food • Health • Safety • Symbol • Iran

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### INTRODUCTION

Safe and Secure Food should be used for the products which are manufactured (produced) from healthy ingredients in a safe and hygienic condition. In addition to minimum expected characteristics and intrinsic properties, these products should have some features which can improve the health condition of the consumers.

Several studies have demonstrated that food supply is a major contributing factor to the health of people. Regarding this fact, all around the world many governments and organizations have established special policies and standards related to the safety and nutritional quality of the food products [1].

In International scales, we can mention the Codex Alimentarius (Latin for "food book") which is a collection of internationally recognized standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other recommendations relating to foods, food production and food safety. Its texts are developed and maintained by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), a body that was established in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Commission's main aims are stated as being to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the international food trade. The Codex Alimentarius is recognized by the World Trade Organization as an international reference point for the resolution of disputes concerning food safety and consumer protection.

The CAC is open to the governments of all member nations, or associate members of FAO and/or WHO [2]. It currently has 183 Member States. The FAO/WHO Project and Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund) was launched in 2003. The main objective of Codex Trust Fund is to help developing countries and those with economies in transition to enhance their level of effective participation in the Codex.

There have been also valuable domestic experiences about food safety in different countries around the world:

For instance there are 15 agencies sharing oversight responsibilities in the food safety system in The United States of America, although the two primary agencies are the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which are responsible for the safety of meat, poultry and processed egg. [3].

Food and Drug Administration publishes the Food Code, a model set of guidelines and procedures that assists food control jurisdictions by providing a scientifically sound technical and legal basis for regulating the retail and food service industries, including restaurants, grocery stores and institutional foodservice providers such as nursing homes. Regulatory agencies at all levels of government in the United States use the FDA Food Code to develop or update food safety rules in their jurisdictions that are consistent with national food regulatory policy. According to the FDA, 48 of 56 states and territories, representing 79% of the U.S. population, have adopted food codes patterned after one of the five

versions of the Food Code, beginning with the 1993 edition. Besides, The Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, known as CFSAN, which is one of six product-oriented centers, in addition to a nationwide field force, that carries out the mission of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), provides services to consumers, domestic and foreign industry and other outside groups regarding field programs; agency administrative tasks; scientific analysis and support; and policy, planning and handling of critical issues related to food and cosmetics [4].

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is an independent statutory agency established by the *Food Standards Australia New Zealand Act 1991*. FSANZ is part of the Australian Government's Health and Ageing portfolio. There is an agreement or Treaty between the Governments of Australia and New Zealand that establishes FSANZ's role in setting joint food standards, i.e. standards that apply in both countries [5].

FSANZ develops food standards to cover the food industry in Australia and New Zealand. This agency (FSANZ) develops the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code which regulates the use of ingredients, processing aids, colorings, additives, vitamins and minerals. The code also covers the composition of some foods e.g. dairy, meat and beverages as well as standards developed by new technologies such as novel foods. They are also responsible for labeling for both packaged and unpackaged food, including specific mandatory warnings or advisory labels [6].

Creating a competitive atmosphere for evaluating the domestic food products and granting the Health and Safety Symbol in Iran in order to improve the quality of products and reduce the consumption of harmful ingredients and this will secure the goals of the Ministry of Health for encouraging the producers to provide healthier brands.

**Food Safety in Islamic Republic of Iran:** In Islamic Republic of Iran, as well, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education [At the time that Dr. Lankarani was in charge as the minister] has established (designed) a special symbol for food quality and safety. This symbol would be granted to the companies (factories) of which products have been prepared according to safety and health terms of the regulations guideline [7].

The symbol consists of a green apple (resembling health) and the words safety and health which are written next to the apple figure (Fig.1). The companies which have the credit for the safety of the food or drinking products can print this symbol on the hologram of their brands.



Fig. 1: Health and Safety Symbol.

**Advantage of Health and Safety Symbol (Apple Symbol):**

In fact, by granting the Health and Safety Symbol to the companies, the Ministry of Health is aiming for the following objectives:

- Improving the safety and quality of the food products
- Making it easy for the consumers to find out which brands are the best, according to quality and safety
- Creating a competitive atmosphere for the producers

**The Measures of Evaluation for Granting the Symbol:**

The evaluation will be based upon the executive (implementing) regulations of the Symbol of Health and Safety. Therefore, the presented brands should match all the terms which have been included in the regulations. Furthermore, the applicant companies should have the license for trading affairs and the license for using the National Standard Symbol and of course, these licenses should not be expired [7].

**The Expected Outcomes for Granting the Health and Safety Symbol:**

The public health will be improved if healthy and safe products are chosen and consumed; and this won't be possible, unless we increase the public knowledge about Health and Safety Symbol. If people have enough information about this symbol, they will choose safer and healthier brands. In addition, public attitude will have a great impact on the companies and the producers will be encouraged to improve the quality of their products.

**The Results of Performed Measures [7]:**

- Developing (compiling) the implementing regulations for granting Health and Safety Symbol.
- Developing the guidelines (manuals) for monitoring brands which have been granted the Symbol.
- Forming the Expert Committee in order to investigate the documents of 280 products (in 8 sessions)

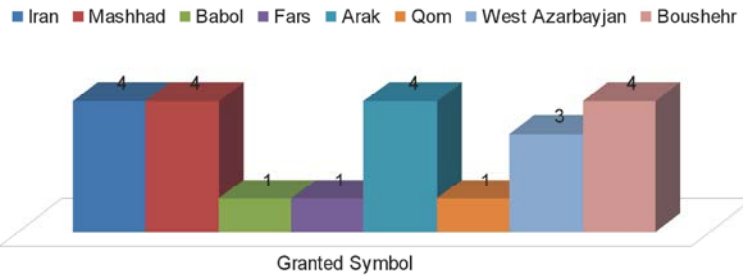


Chart 1: The number of products which have been granted the symbol according to separate medical universities

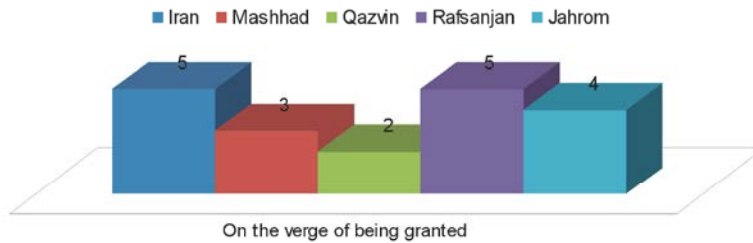


Chart 2: The number of products which are on the verge of being granted the symbol according to separate medical universities

Table 1: List of all products with safety and health symbol (22 companies and 31 products).

| Product Name  | Series |
|---|--------|
| 1) Orange juice fortified with calcium                    |        |
| 2) Grapefruit juice                                       | 1      |
| 1) pomegranate juice without sugar                        |        |
| 2) Red grape juice  |        |
| 3) pomegranate and red grape juice mixed                  | 2      |
| 1) saffron powder   |        |
| 2 Saffron strings   | 3      |
| Saffron powder  | 4      |
| 1) dry date   |        |
| 2) semi-dry date  | 5      |
| Date packaged food  | 6      |
| natural olive oil   | 7      |
| 1)Roasted Peanut  |        |
| 2) Mixed nuts (almonds and pistachio trees)               | 8      |
| Natural honey   | 9      |
| 1) Pasteurized low-fat yogurt (1/5 percent fat) Probiotic |        |
| 2 Pasteurized milk(low-fat fortified with vitamin D 3)    | 10     |
| Pasteurized low-fat probiotic yogurt                      | 11     |
| virgin olive oil  | 12     |

- Forming the Committee for granting the Symbol and approving 22 eligible products (in 5 sessions)
- Holding three ceremonies for granting Health and Safety Symbol (in the presence of Minister of Health)
- Forming the first Higher Committee for granting the Symbol and approving 19 products in the year 2009.

Several Medical Universities across the country are investigating the documents of the products which are capable of being granted the Health and Safety Symbol.

In the charts (1 and 2), the number of products which have been granted the Health and Safety Symbol or are on the verge of being granted the Symbol, has been represented. In table 1 List of all products with safety and health symbol has been represented.

**Obstacles Facing the Progress of Food Health and Safety Symbol Project in Iran:** Despite taking huge steps, the ministry of health and Symbol of Health and Safety committee seem to have a long way to go to meet the public concerns regarding foods safety. For instance, the committee has not established special standards for nutritional demands of different age groups of the society, yet (Specially in the case of the foods which are produced primarily for young infants and children) [1].

The Food Health and Safety program has also some deficiencies in other aspects: For instance, claims for health benefits should be based on the totality of available scientific evidence, including observational data collected from large populations as well as the results from randomized clinical trials, As these are considered by Codex Alimentarius Committee [2]. The committee can also expand their evaluation and consider other legitimate factors such as economic and societal values (These factors have been considered by CAC) [2].

There are also some other obstacles which have slowed down the progress of Food Health and Safety Symbol project:

- Failure to properly identify all of the products which could be granted the food health and safety symbol.
- Failure to submit a valid license for some of the products which are introduced
- Lack of activity in monitoring the safety of products which have been granted the symbol (more details could be added)
- Failure to report the exact PRP score for some of the production units Failure to submit documentation about the health and safety features of the products mentioned in Form No. 1 by the production units.

Despite all of these insufficiencies, the future looks bright for this project. As it is the first national program in this field (area) in Iran, it is expected that many of these problems will be solved in near future by gaining more experience and of course observing the feedbacks in the society.

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