



**SGE** Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Ernährung  
**SSN** Société Suisse de Nutrition  
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Survey Report:  
Effectiveness of three different front-of-pack labels on  
foods to support consumers in making healthy choices

## Summary

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The Swiss Society for Nutrition (SGE) – a non-profit and non-governmental organisation – is the national organisation in charge of nutrition in Switzerland. It provides scientific information on all nutritional issues to experts and the general public. Within the framework of the National Programme on Diet and Physical Activity (NPDPA) 2008–2012, the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH commissioned the SGE to study and, if warranted, develop the foundation for introducing a standardised and easily comprehensible healthy choices logo for foods. It was in that context that the SGE conducted this consumer survey. The goal of the survey was to expand our knowledge of Swiss consumers and support the FOPH in the planning and implementation of consumer information measures.

The goal of the survey was to determine which front-of-pack label (traffic light, GDA or logo) is better, i.e. more effective, at supporting Swiss consumers in making healthy food choices. During January and February 2010, 1016 adult residents of Switzerland (60 percent German-speaking, 28 percent French-speaking and 12 percent Italian-speaking Switzerland) were surveyed.

Amongst the studied labels, the awareness level is highest for the GDA (81 percent), which is also the one grocery shoppers observe (66 percent of the 81 percent) and utilise (55 percent of the 81 percent) the most. One out of three consumers is familiar with the traffic light, whereas the logo is largely unknown (14 percent).

At the start of the survey, respondents consider the traffic light the most helpful label – an 8 on a scale from 1 to 10, for a first place in the ranking. While the GDA is considered similarly helpful (7.8 on the scale), it still only ranks a clear second. The logo, which reaches a modest 5.4 on the scale, is ranked last (third place) by consumers.

In fact, however, none of the tested labels allows consumers to consistently and reliably recognise healthier products, be it across the 10 food categories or within each specific product category.

In all, the traffic light and the GDA/logo combination help most consumers make the correct choice (71 percent and 69 percent, respectively), albeit not in all product categories. While the logo helps consumers recognise healthier products somewhat less frequently (67 percent), it does so across all categories but one. The GDA helps 66 percent of consumers make the correct choice, though not in all categories (comparable to the traffic light and the GDA/logo combination).

Expectations regarding the benefits of the labels do not match the actual benefits: e.g. the GDA and particularly the traffic light are considered helpful by most consumers, even though those two labels lead to some pronouncedly wrong choices in several product categories.



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Of the four tested label options, the logo allows for the quickest decisions (12.79 seconds on average). Interpreting the traffic light or the GDA takes 35 percent and 50 percent longer, respectively. Interpreting the GDA/logo combination requires the same amount of time as reading the GDA by itself. Consumers who make the wrong choice tend to require more time to arrive at a decision.

In closing, consumers clearly consider the GDA/logo combination the most helpful of the four tested label options, based, amongst other things, on the perceived “double security”. And while the traffic light is considered significantly less helpful than the GDA/logo combination, it scores significantly higher than either the GDA or the logo individually. The logo, in turn, is rated least helpful.

**Conclusion:**

The survey demonstrates that while each of the tested labels is able to assist the consumer in making healthy choices, they all have certain limitations. The aforementioned discrepancy between subjective perception of a particular label’s benefits and its actual benefits is striking. The GDA/logo combination seems to emerge as a kind of “having your cake and eating it too” solution – it offers a good deal of information for interested consumers as well as a validation of their choice, while at the same time assisting uncertain or passive consumers in their choice and enabling harried consumers to make a quick decision.

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