

Peer Review Plan

Preliminary Title: Beyond Nutrition and Organic Labels—Emerging Economic Issues in Food Labeling

Type of Report
(ERR, EIB, EB,
TB, SOR,) ERR

Agency: Economic Research Service [X] Influential Scientific Information
USDA [] Highly Influential Scientific Assessment

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Subject of Review: As consumers demand to know more about how their food is produced, manufacturers have voluntarily added new identifying information on product labels or have done so because the Federal government requires them to do so. This sea of process-based labels identifies all manner of product attributes. Some, like the USDA organic label, are precisely defined and monitored for truthfulness while others, like the many labels saying the product is natural, are merely suggestive. This report asks, can government intervention in food labeling undo the inherent asymmetry of information over process-based label claims, where sellers know more about foods than consumers do? Can intervention facilitate the creation of markets in which consumers and producers share the same, correct, ideas about what foods are? This report uses the examples of the Nutrition Facts label and health- and nutrition-related claims to identify some of the economic issues intervention in food labels raises. Then, the report discusses experience with four labels, three of which highlight agriculture production and processing practices—the USDA Organic label, labels that identify foods as made without genetically-engineered ingredients, and labels on poultry products that claim chickens were raised without antibiotics—while the fourth label identifies the country of origin (COOL) of the product. USDA intervention in these four label claims varies: Organic claims must be certified by a USDA-accredited State or private group as meeting the USDA standard; COOL is mandatory for many product categories; Raised without Antibiotics labels meet a private sector standard with USDA approval, and optional verification; and food claimed free of genetically engineered ingredients meets any one of multiple private standards, and optional verification. Finally, the report examines future prospects in light of rapid adoption of new forms of electronic communication.

Purpose of Review: The purpose of the review is to ensure the high-quality of the economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience.

Type of Review: [] Panel Review [X] Individual Reviewers
[] Alternative Process (Briefly Explain):

Timing of Review (Est.): Start: 10/3/16 End: 3/6/17 Completed: 3/6/17

Number of Reviewers: [] 3 or fewer [x] 4 to 10 [] More than 10

Primary Disciplines/Types of Expertise Needed for Review: Economists

Reviewers selected by: [X] Agency [] Designated Outside Organization
Organization's Name:

