



Heart Symbol

and current FOPL situation in
Finland

2022



Heart Symbol in a nutshell

- The primary goal of Heart Symbol is to promote public health.
- Heart Symbol is based on
 - Nordic and Finnish nutrition recommendations
 - product categories and product group specific nutritional criteria.
- The right to use the Heart Symbol is granted by a group of independent professionals

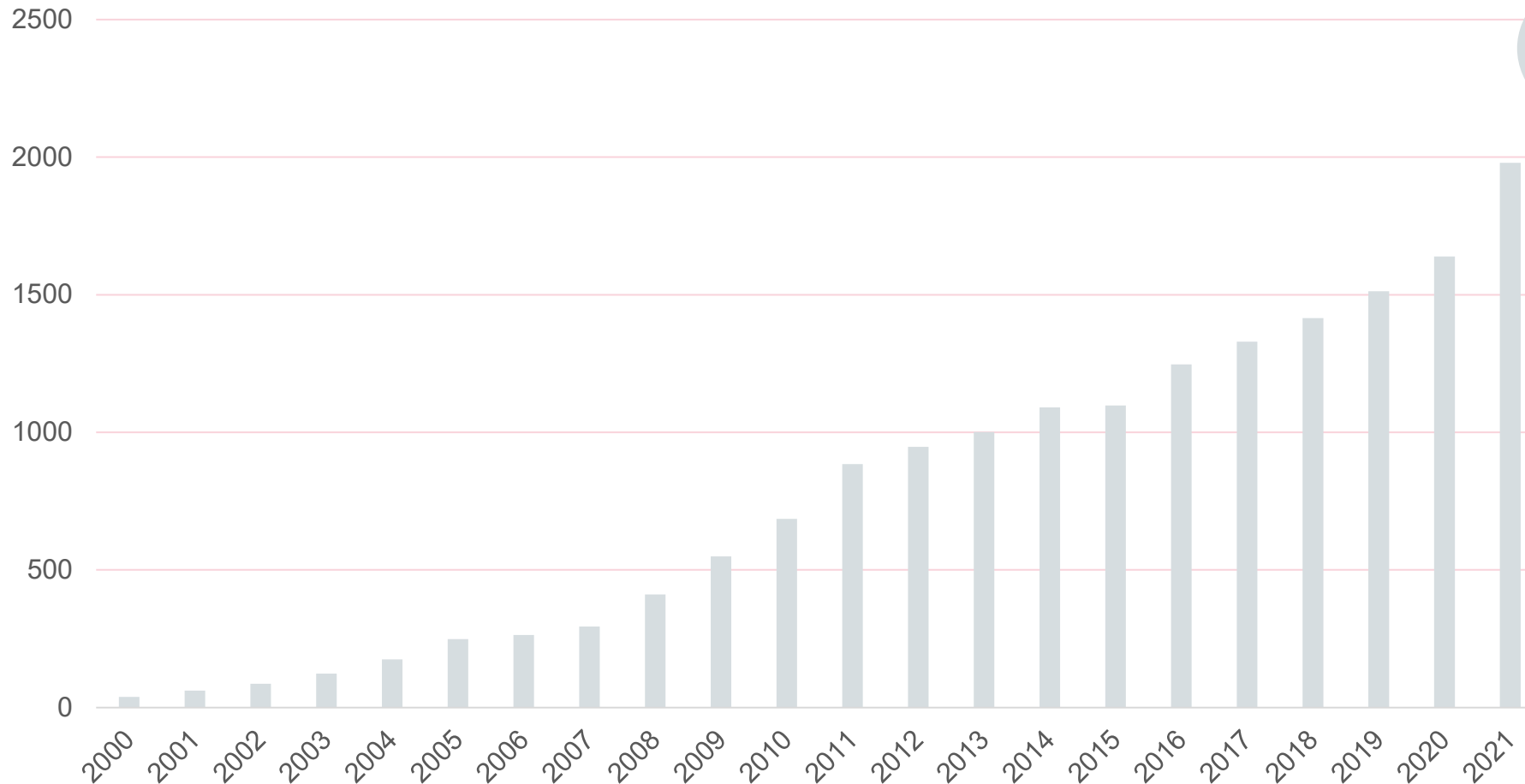




Which are criteria for the use of Heart Symbol?

- Based on Finnish nutrition recommendations and national population-based nutrition surveys.
- The criteria focus on the main nutrition challenges in Finland
- The criteria are defined for ten main food groups that are further divided into subgroups. Every subgroups have specific criteria.
 - Total fat and quality of fat
 - Salt
 - Fibre
 - Sugar
- Products on the market and technological limitations are also taken into account.
- The criteria has been created and are regularly updated if needed by the committee of independent nutrition and medical professionals.

Heart symbol is growing year by year



All major food companies in Finland use Heart Symbol in their products.

The amount of Heart Symbol products



Heart Symbol is very well known and appreciated

Heart Symbol has very high awareness

- Brand awareness is 87 %* or 91 %** among in Finnish adults.
- 67 %** of Finnish adults says they use Heart Symbol products
- 74 %* of consumers aware of Heart Symbol says that it is important to have the Heart Symbol in supermarkets
- 65 %* of consumers aware of Heart Symbol says that the Heart Symbol ymbol increased their willingness to buy the product

Brand value has increased among consumers**

- The 14h most valued brand in Finland in 2020
- High user satisfaction – 10th best brand in Finland.
- High willingness to recommend among users – 6th the most recommended brand in Finland.

High customer satisfaction among food industry and food service industry

Based on annual survey, Heart Symbol has very high customer satisfaction. Customers are loyal and have high willingness to recommend Heart Symbol to potential customers.

Made by Kantar TNS Oy, Autumn 2021

**Made by ToinenPHD a consumer insight agency. 10/2020, Participants: adults in Finland (n=2500)*

*** Made by Taloustutkimus* and Marketing and advertising –magazine 6/2020. (* an independent market research company), Total amount of brands in survey 536. Participants: adults in Finland (n=1100)*



Heart Symbol product process

- The right to use the Heart Symbol is granted by a group of independent professionals
 - chair Marina Heinonen, Helsinki University
- Food companies can apply Heart Symbol online
- The product must comply with the set criteria

<https://www.sydanmerkki.fi/en/criteria/>

- The right to use the Symbol is subject to a charge (maximum 500 eur/product)
- Control checks are carried out at random





Acknowledged by authorities and health professionals

Notified as nutritional claim

- Heart Symbol is the only symbol on the Finnish market to be regarded as a nutritional claim (EC No 1924/2006) *Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry*

Integrated in guidelines and health promotion

- Heart Symbol in guidelines for consumers (Finnish Nutrition Recommendations 2014) *National Nutrition Council*
- Set criteria for the nutrition quality of served food = Heart symbol criteria for meals
- Criteria for (public) procurements both for foods and meals
 - Guidelines for day care and primary, high and vocational schools
 - Guidelines for institutional catering services



Used by nutrition and health professionals widely



Study: Heart Symbol helps to meet nutrition recommendations

The study suggests that there is great potential to reduce the intake of saturated fat and salt by using products bearing the Heart Symbol, with more success in meeting nutrition recommendations.

Reference: Raulio S et al. Nutrition Health Food Sci 2017; 5(1):1-7.

Materials and method

- Data for the dietary intake were derived from National FINDIET 2012 survey. Dietary intake of participants (n=1295) aged 25-64 years was collected using 48-hour recalls for consecutive days.
- Scenario: products not complying with the Heart Symbol were replaced by foods complying with the criteria
→ compared with the baseline.
- Replacements in four main food groups: milk, milk products and cheese; bread and bakery products, bread spreads and meat cuts.



Results from study

The intake of saturated fat, salt, sucrose and fiber at baseline and in the scenario (Heart Symbol products)

	Men, n=585		Women, n=710	
	Baseline	Scenario	Baseline	Scenario
Energy (kJ)	9386	8835	7253	6871
Fat (% energy)	36.1	32.2	35.5	31.7
Hard fats (SFA + trans) (E%)	14.4	9.9	14.2	10.0
Protein (% energy)	17.3	18.7	17.2	18.6
Carbohydrate (% energy)	42.0	44.9	43.7	46.6
Sucrose (% energy)	9.2	9.0	10.1	9.6
Fiber (g/MJ)	2.4	2.7	2.9	3.2
Salt (g/day)	8.9	7.9	6.5	5.8



Nutri-score and Finnish food market?





Basics of FOPL

FOPL should

- Help consumers to make better and healthier choices
- Encourage industry to reformulate and promote healthier options

FOPL must not

- Mislead consumers

To be taken into account on European level

Similarities in European wide challenges in nutrition and dietary guidelines but differences in dietary habits and sources of critical nutrients.




Nutriscore vs. Finnish dietary guidelines

The most problematic product groups in the Nutri-score system in Finland

- Breads and cereal products
- Milk products
- Fats and oils

Nutri-score faces problems when the focus is set on important sources of unsaturated fats, salt and fibre:

- it doesn't show clearly the difference between healthy and unhealthy products.



INCREASE	EXCHANGE	LIMIT
Colourful roots and vegetables	White bread, pasta and rice to whole grain alternatives	Adding salt to food. Salty bread, cold cuts and cheese.
Peas, beans and lentils	Butter and butter based spreads to vegetable oil based fat spreads and oils	Soft drinks, energy drinks, juice. Sweets and sweet baked goods. Sugary yoghurts and <i>villi</i> (soured milk).
Colourful berries and fruits	Whole fat milk, butter milk, yoghurt and fatty cheese to products with less fat	Sausages and cold cuts. Beef, pork and mutton.
Fish and other seafood	Frying food to boiling and cooking in the oven	Too many snacks between meals.
Nuts and seeds	Fast food to home-cooked meals	Alcoholic beverages.



Problematic issues on Nutriscore - fibre and salt

Nutriscore

- does not distinguish between low and high content of fibre
- does not distinguish between low and high content of salt
- e.g. indicates that even high salted bread is the best choice (A)
- Why?
 - The ranges of scores for fibre and salt in the NS algorithm are too narrow
 - Critical and most meaningful nutrients are different in different food groups, and they differ across countries because of different sources of nutrients in different food cultures.
 - The power of one critical nutrient is too weak to indicate better and worse choices within a food category



Bread and other cereals as sources of salt and fiber

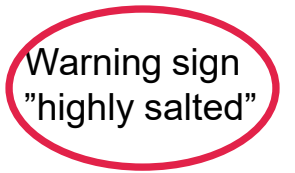
Rye bread,
Fiber 11 g, Salt 0,7%



White bread
Fiber 3,6 g, salt 1,1 %



Rye bread
Highly salted



Whole grain barley
Fiber 11 g



Jasmine rice
Fiber 1,7 g



Whole grain pasta
Fiber 6 g



Pasta
Fiber 4g





Problematic issues on Nutriscore - fat quality

Nutriscore

- does not indicate good sources of unsaturated fats
- does not distinguish between fat spreads with different fat content
- Why?
 - Nutriscore does not take into account unsaturated fats
 - In Finnish food culture, fats and oils are important sources of both saturated and unsaturated fats
 - It is important to encourage Finns both to lower SFA intake and simultaneously partly replace the intake with unsaturated fats



Fats as sources of saturated and unsaturated fats

Rape seed oil
Plenty of unsaturated fats



Spread with Heart symbol
Hard fat (SAFA) 28 %
Salt 0,7 %



Butter-oil-mixture
Hard fat (SAFA) 47 %
Salt 0,6 %



Low-fat spread
Hard fat (SAFA) 39 %
salt 1,6 %



Spread with Heart symbol
Hard fat (SAFA) 24 %
Salt 1 %



Butter
Hard fat (SFA) 71 %
Salt 0,8 %





Problematic issues on Nutriscore - fat in dairy products

Nutriscore

- does not distinguish between milk with different fat content
- does not distinguish between cheeses low and high content of fat
- Why?
 - In Finnish food culture, dairy products are important sources of saturated fats, and over the years reformulation has taken place to produce products with lower fat content
 - Critical and most meaningful nutrients are different in different food groups, and they differ across countries because of different sources of nutrients in different food cultures.
 - The power of one critical nutrient is too weak to indicate better and worse choices within a food category



Dairy products

Fat-free milk



Other milks (fat >0,5%)



Oat drink



Cheese, fat 15 %, salt 1,2 %



Cream cheese, fat 29 %, salt 1,3 %



Cream cheese, fat 32 %, salt 1,8 %





Nutri-score from Finnish point of view

Plus

- Nutri-score covers all the food products
- Label itself seems to be easy to understand
- Works in some product groups

Cons

- How to fit one algorithm and only few food product categories all over the Europa
- Because the algorithm is quite complex it does not encourage food industry to reformulation
- In Finland Nutri-score seems to face problems when the focus is set on important sources of unsaturated fats, salt and fibre: it doesn't show clearly the difference between healthy and unhealthy products.
- The most problematic product groups in the Nutri-score system in Finland: Breads and cereal products, milk products, fats and oils



What next?

Our proposal for a pan-European FOPL question

The first thing to do is to set nutrient profiles. It's not needed only for Eu claim regulations but it's also a fundamental base for developing pan-EU FOPL.

Having a pan-EU FOPL is a good idea but it's very difficult to develop: Challenges in nutrition are quite similar across Europe but dietary habits and sources of critical nutrients are different. We suspect there are no such single FOPL that can improve health and tackle obesity pandemic across Europe.

National dietary guidelines should be taken into account and reflected in the FOPL. In Finland we have had national FOPL, Heart Symbol, for 20 years. It's known by 90 % of Finns. Heart Symbol is also very widely used by food industry. Our concern is that it will be replaced by a pan-European system that is unsuitable for our food environment and takes development backwards.

We suggest that every EU country should have FOPL but each country should have option to choose which FOPL suits best for their national needs.

For more information on Heart Symbol

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