

## Food for thought – food allergy avoidance

In the Summer of last year I returned from a trip to Slovakia with a coeliac friend, having been impressed by a system observed in their restaurants. Each menu choice was followed by a list of numbers and each number referred to a food allergen that was included in that dish.

I don't have any food allergies or intolerancies, but for anyone who does, this system is great as all restaurants were using the same numbered list of allergens. Once we understood the system, we didn't need to translate the description of the dish to understand if it contained specific allergens. I wondered if this was an EU initiative but as I didn't find a similar system in the Czech Republic, Germany or Belgium on that trip I concluded that it must be unique to Slovakia.

**Good news:** the Food Standards Agency has announced that this allergen labelling system is to be introduced in the UK by mid December. It will apply to both pre-packed and non pre-packed (loose) foods, i.e. both grocery and restaurant offerings. Whether the allergens are included or added to the foods they must be referenced on the labelling.

We already have allergen labelling on most pre-packed foods but this will be extended to include 14 allergens, as listed below.

The allergen labelling requirement for businesses that provide non pre-packed foods (such as restaurants, delis, takeaway businesses, food suppliers and institutional caterers) is new. They will need to state the inclusion of any one of the 14 allergens to their customers in a variety of possible ways, such as on menus and chalkboards, clear signposting to where the information can be obtained and through verbal communication.

The 14 allergens are:

- cereals containing gluten
- crustaceans
- molluscs
- eggs
- fish
- peanuts
- nuts
- soya
- milk
- celery
- mustard
- sesame
- lupin
- sulphur dioxide (at a level above 10mg/kg or 10mg/litre)

I look forward to seeing this system in use later this year and, for once, I have to say: well done EU Regulations, this is a major step forward!

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