

INS & OUTS OF INGREDIENT LABELING

Spices and Colors

In another Quick Reference on the Ins & Outs of Ingredient Labeling, we cover the tricky aspects of FDA's flavor labeling rules. In this Quick Reference, we tackle the issue of labeling spices and colors which also has its share of nuances.

Beginning with spices, not all ingredients consumers may consider to be "spices" are categorized as such by FDA. FDA defines "spices" as aromatic vegetable substances that function as seasonings rather than as sources of nutrition. For example: basil, oregano, parsley and sage provide flavors yet insignificant nutritional value. These ingredients may be combined and listed as a single ingredient "spices" in the ingredient statement or they may be called out separately.

Vegetables that are traditionally regarded as foods are not considered to be spices. For example: onions, garlic and celery cannot be combined and listed as the single ingredient "spices" in the ingredient statement, even when they are in powder form. Each of the ingredients must be listed individually.

For colors, any added ingredient that functions as a color in food must be specified according to FDA's color additive regulations. There are two classes of food colors; one requires batch certification and one does not. Each class has its own regulations with regard to ingredient labeling.

- Certifiable color additives are typically synthetic and require FDA certification testing on every batch to validate purity and safety. These colors must be listed in the ingredient statement by common or usual name. Examples of certifiable colors include: Yellow 6, Red 40 and Blue 2 Lake.
- Exempt color additives do not require FDA batch certification testing and most may be listed in the ingredient statement in the following ways: "colored with (common name)," "color added" or "artificial color," among others. Examples of exempt colors include: beet juice color, vegetable or fruit juice color and caramel color.
- FDA considers all colors added to be artificial colors and does not permit use of the term "natural colors." Therefore, if a food contains an ingredient that functions as a color, the label claim "no artificial colors" is not allowed.

Finally, what about ingredients that function as both a seasoning and a color? There are several spices like paprika, turmeric and saffron that can have dual functions. When these ingredients are used as spices, they must be listed in the ingredient statement by the term "spice and coloring" or by their common name, such as "paprika." However, if a spice ingredient is used as a color additive only, using the common name in the ingredient statement is not sufficient; rather it must follow the ingredient labeling rules for exempt color additives above. That is, paprika would be listed as "paprika color" or "color added."

NOTE: There is a distinction between FDA and USDA regulations. USDA allows spices and certain ingredients (as long as they are not colors) to be combined in an ingredient statement and called "natural flavors" (or "natural flavorings") or simply "flavors" (or "flavorings"). Therefore, spices, spice extractives, essential oils, oleoresins, onion powder, garlic powder and celery powder are considered natural flavors according to **USDA regulations**, whereas only spice extractives, essential oils and oleoresins are considered "natural flavors" per **FDA regulations**.