



A processing-level label alone is unlikely to improve decisions. Clear nutrition information and consumer education are more effective in supporting healthy, balanced diets.

The idea seems simple: if we add a label showing how “processed” a food is, alongside systems like Nutri-Score, shoppers will make healthier choices. But processing level doesn’t always reflect nutritional quality, and such a label could cause confusion. What processing can do in terms of improvement of food product quality also depends on how the product is formulated, meaning its recipe and which ingredients are used.

A processing label could stigmatise safe, nutritious foods simply because they are classified as “ultra-processed”, misleading people into thinking “less processed” automatically means “healthier”. A food’s degree of processing doesn’t always match its nutritional profile: Some highly processed foods, like fortified wholegrain cereals or plant-based drinks enriched with calcium, can be nutritious. Some minimally processed foods, like certain cheeses or cured meats, can be high in salt or saturated fat.

Research also shows that multiple front-of-pack labels can overwhelm shoppers. Processing-based classification systems are often ambiguous and inconsistent and can contradict nutrition-based scores like Nutri-Score. More labels don’t always lead to better decisions.

The best label is knowledge, understanding what’s in your food and how it fits into your diet. Focusing on nutrition information and ingredient lists is far more reliable than relying on a single processing category or an apparent degree of processing. Finally, healthy eating is about the balance of your entire diet, not the score or category of a single product.

Contact: IUFoST General Secretariat at secretariat@iufost.org, www.iufost.org. Find us on social media: facebook.com/iufost; x.com/IUFoST; linkedin.com/company/iufost; youtube.com/@IUFoST-Official