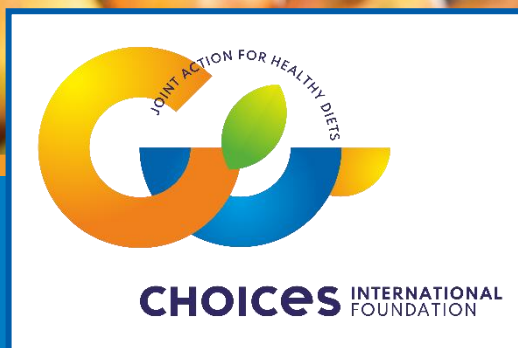


International Choices 5- Level Criteria

A global standard to support multiple food
system actions

VERSION 2025



CHOICES INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

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Preface

Since 2008, the Choices International Foundation has developed science-based nutrient criteria to identify healthier food products. Originally created for positive front-of-pack labelling (FOPL), these criteria have been regularly updated and are widely used as the basis for national endorsement logos and as an international benchmark for the food sector. Evidence shows that such programmes can improve consumer choices and stimulate product reformulation, particularly when combined with education. However, FOPL alone is insufficient; coherent and effective government policies are also needed to promote healthier diets.

Choices therefore advocates for one internationally aligned, science-based nutrient profiling system that can underpin a comprehensive national policy package. While globally harmonized, the criteria can be adapted to local dietary patterns, nutritional priorities, food standards, and market availability.

To support broader policy applications, the Choices International Scientific Committee expanded the original logo criteria into a 5-level system, first published in 2021. This system enables positive, negative and graded FOPL schemes (3- or 5-level) and can also support complementary measures such as marketing restrictions to children, reformulation targets, fiscal policies, school food standards, fortification strategies, and nutrition claims—ideally alongside mandatory graded FOPL.

The 2025 revision of the Choices 5-level criteria incorporates stakeholder consultation, the latest scientific evidence, and recent international policy developments. Key updates include:

- Introduction of equivalence criteria for plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy, ensuring comparable nutrient standards with animal-based products.
- Inclusion of non-sugar sweeteners (NSS) as a factor that can lower a product's classification and restrict eligibility for positive FOPL.
- Alignment of industrially produced trans-fatty acid (iTFA) thresholds with current WHO recommendations.
- Review of potential whole-grain and micronutrient criteria, which were not adopted at this stage due to remaining evidence and data gaps.

These updates strengthen the scientific robustness and global applicability of the Choices system as a tool to support healthier and more sustainable food environments.

This document summarizes both the development and the 2025 revision of the International Choices 5-level criteria. It is intended as a practical reference for countries seeking to design coherent policy packages to promote healthier diets. Feedback from governments, organizations, and researchers will inform the next revision, scheduled for 2030.

The International Choices 5-level Criteria 2025 replace the previous version.

We thank the Board of the Choices International Foundation for its continued support of the Scientific Committee's work in strengthening the Choices Programme.

Herbert Smorenburg, Managing Director

Introduction

The Choices logo criteria¹ form a global standard for healthier food and are developed to use as a tool to improve a population's diet. The criteria are designed to identify the healthiest products within a category of foods. In short, the system is based on product-group-specific nutrients, distinguishing between basic and non-basic (or discretionary) food categories. Products in basic food categories are expected to contribute positive nutrients to the diet and are included in food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs), whereas discretionary foods are consumed for convenience or pleasure, but not for nutritional reasons. Thresholds for industrially produced trans-fat, saturated fat, sodium, added sugars, and fiber are derived from international nutrient recommendations and calibrated using food composition data. Compliance targets (20% for basic foods, 10% for discretionary foods) were used to ensure practical feasibility. As the criteria highlight the healthiest options in each food category, they can be applied as a basis for national positive (endorsement) front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) programs and as an external global benchmark for the food sector. Encouraged by WHO and other international organizations, an increasing number of countries are preparing and implementing measures to improve consumer food choices utilizing a variety of food system actions; various forms of FOP labelling, taxation, limitation of marketing to children, standards for product reformulation, food purchasing standards, school feeding standards, standards for nutrition and health claims etc.

In July 2020, Choices announced its new strategy, shifting focus from industry to governments and from a positive logo to coherent sets of food system actions. The final goal of these food system actions is to improve public health by encouraging the consumption of healthier foods and decreasing the consumption of the least healthy foods. To support multiple food system actions coherently, we have been asked, as the International Scientific Committee, to extend the Choices logo criteria to a 5-level system that classifies food products into five healthiness levels. Such a 5-level system could support multiple food system actions, as is shown in Figure 1 for basic food groups and in Figure 2 for non-basic (or discretionary) food groups.

Choices levels	1	2	3	4	5
Positive FOPL	Positive Logo				
Graded 5-level FOPL	A	B	C	D	E
Graded 3-level FOPL	Green		Amber	Red	
Negative FOPL	Negative Logo				
Reformulation	% Green / A	% Green / B	% Amber / C	% Red / D,E	
Marketing to children	Not allowed				
Subsidies	Possible	Possible			
Taxation				Possible	Possible
School meals			Not allowed	Not allowed	
School environments	Min % Green / A	Min % Green / B		Not allowed	
Fortification	Possible	Possible	Not allowed	Not allowed	
Health / nutrition claims	Possible	Possible	Not allowed	Not allowed	

Figure 1 Recommended application of Choices 5-level criteria for basic food groups

1) International Choices criteria - A global standard for healthier food (Version 2019-4); Choices International Foundation. Available at www.choicesprogramme.org

Choices levels	1	2	3	4	5
Positive FOPL	Not allowed				
Graded 5-level FOPL	C		D	E	
Graded 3-level FOPL	Amber		Red		
Negative FOPL	Negative Logo				
Reformulation	% Amber / C		% Red / D,E		
Marketing to children	Not allowed				
Subsidies	Not allowed				
Taxation			Possible	Possible	
School meals	By exception		Not allowed		
School environments			Not allowed		
Fortification	By exception		Not allowed		
Health / nutrition claims	By exception		Not allowed		

Figure 2 Recommended application of Choices 5-level criteria for **non-basic** food groups to support multiple food system actions. FOPL = front-of pack label.

To extend the Choices logo criteria to a 5-level system, we applied the same principles we used to develop the logo criteria. That means we used the same product group definitions, the same key nutrients for each product group and the same rule that a product needs to meet all nutrient thresholds to qualify (no compensation). We determined four sets of threshold criteria using a combination of compliance levels calculated from a large international food group specific database, the Choices logo criteria, and WHO nutrient profiling systems developed to restrict marketing to children. We validated these sets of thresholds through a comparison with indicator foods from food-based dietary guidelines from various countries. Some thresholds were adjusted after the validation. This resulted in the Choices 5-level criteria that can be applied to different contexts and to support a variety of health policies, to prevent both undernutrition and obesity. Details about the development of the 5-level system can be found in our publication of December 2021.²

The criteria revision occurs periodically, every four to five years, to stay up to date with current product innovations, consumer preferences, nutrition science and food technology.³ Also, the stepwise tightening of the criteria pushes food companies to keep improving their products. It facilitates consumers to get gradually accustomed to products with less sugar, fat and salt and more fiber. The previous revision was published in 2020³. Recently, we published the 2025 revision⁴, focusing on priority areas identified through stakeholder consultation and recent scientific developments. Key updates include the introduction of nutrient-based equivalence criteria for plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy, based on protein and selected micronutrient thresholds. Non-sugar sweeteners (NSSs) were newly included as a factor that lowers a product's health classification and makes it ineligible for a positive FOPNL. Additionally, the industrially produced trans-fatty acid (iTFA) criteria were revised and aligned with the latest World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, improving both technical feasibility and policy coherence. While options for incorporating whole-grain and micronutrient criteria were explored, these were not included in the current revision. The 2025 update system enhances the scientific rigor, policy alignment, and global applicability of the Choices system. By providing a harmonized and evidence-based tool, it aims to support national policies that foster healthier food environments and, ultimately, improve public health outcomes worldwide.

2) Tognon, G.; Beltramo, B.; Schilpzand, R.; Lissner, L.; Roodenburg, A.J.C.; Don, R.; Nair, K.M.; Nnam, N.; Hamaker, B.; Smorenburg, H. Development of the Choices 5-Level Criteria to Support Multiple Food System Actions. *Nutrients* **2021**, *13*, 4509. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13124509>

3) Van den Assum, S.; Schilpzand, R.; Lissner, L.; Don, R.; Nair, K.M.; Nnam, N.; Uauy, R.; Yang, Y.; Pekcan, A.G.; Roodenburg, A.J.C. Periodic Revisions of the International Choices Criteria: Process and Results. *Nutrients* **2020**, *12*, 2774. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12092774>

4) Smorenburg, H.; Kissock, K.R.; Beck, E.J.; Mathur, P.; Hamaker, B.; Lissner, L.; Marostica, M.R., Jr.; Nnam, N.; Takimoto, H.; Roodenburg, A.J.C. Revision of the Choices Nutrient Profiling System. *Nutrients* **2026**, *18*, 258. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu18020258>

Adaptation before implementation

Although the Choices International criteria have global relevance, they are mostly used on a national level. This demands further specification of the national circumstances before they can be used for implementation. Choices International wants to make the criteria as pragmatic and applicable as possible. Therefore, national initiatives are encouraged and supported to customize the criteria following the same nutrient profiling methodology used for the international criteria revisions.

National adaptation. The global criteria should be reviewed by a national committee of leading independent scientists to match with national circumstances. Important elements to consider are national nutrition issues and related nutrition policies, food legislation requirements, food culture and consumer taste. This national customization offers the opportunity to add criteria that address certain kinds of malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies. The International Scientific Committee will review the nationally adapted criteria.

Implementation. The Choices criteria can be used as scientific substantiation for coherent sets of food system actions, as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, by governments, food companies, NGOs and multi-stakeholder platforms. The Choices secretariat can provide comprehensive support and tools for capacity building and implementation, such as training and technical support. For more information, see www.choicesprogramme.org or contact us at info@choicesprogramme.org.

When individual food companies use the Choices criteria, the nationally adapted criteria for their market should be used. The international criteria are applicable if no national adaptation exists in their market.

Product assessment

The following steps determine if a product complies with the Choices criteria.

1. The product will be classified into one of the Choices product groups. In most cases, this is self-explanatory by using the definitions of each product group in this document. In case of doubt, see Annex II.
2. The product's nutrient content will be assessed against all the criteria of the relevant product group. Nutrient data can be obtained from documents, the back-of-pack nutrition panel or independent laboratory analysis. Food products are of natural origin, so a nutrient content variation must be considered. If data from laboratory analysis are used, a deviation tolerance of 15% can be used for sugar, energy, fats and fiber, and 20% for sodium.

Compliance with national legislation

The product should comply with all rules and requirements of the national food legislation. The Choices criteria only address the levels of six nutrients. All other health aspects of food products, such as food safety, the presence of additives, artificial sweeteners, and potential allergens, should be regulated by national food legislation. By submitting a product to the Choices criteria for assessment, a brand owner confirms that the product complies with all relevant national food quality and labelling regulations.

The following product groups are not included in the criteria:

- products containing > 0.5% alcohol
- food supplements
- products for use under medical supervision
- foods for children under a year old

International Choices 5-level criteria

The Choices five-level criteria for basic and non-basic food groups are tabled below. To be assigned to a certain level, product nutrient content should be \leq (for fiber \geq) than listed thresholds for all nutrients. Products not complying with one of the thresholds for L4 are assigned L5. All products containing industrially produced trans-fatty acids iTFAs ≥ 1 g/100 g on total fat are restricted to L4 or L5, and all products containing iTFAs ≥ 2 g/100 g on total fat are assigned L5. All products containing non-sugar sweeteners (NSS) are downgraded by one level. When nutrient thresholds are not provided, they are considered non-critical for that food group. L1-L5 = Choices level 1-5. The nutrient definitions are listed in Annex 1. SAFA denotes saturated fatty acids.

Basic Food Groups

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES		L1	L2	L3	L4	
FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES	All fruit and vegetable products that do not contain additions comply				All types of fresh fruit and vegetables that are additions-free and minimally processed, including freshly frozen and/or cut fruits and vegetables. E.g., pre-cut vegetable mixes, cabbage, pre-sliced watermelon, cucumber, bok choy, broccoli, frozen spinach (without cream), frozen raspberries, and papaya.	
PROCESSED VEGETABLES	Sodium g/100g	0.100	0.25	0.4	0.65	All types of processed vegetables that have undergone further processing, excluding vegetable juices and frozen or pre-sliced vegetables. E.g., canned tomatoes, canned carrots, frozen spinach with cream, pickles (gherkins, pearl onions, relish), seaweed, guacamole, olives, vegetable purées, green beans.
	Sugar g/100g	7.0	8.5	10	11	
	Fiber g/100g	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.7	
PROCESSED FRUIT	SAFA g/100g	1.1	2.0	3.0	4.0	All types of processed fruits that have undergone further processing, excluding fruit juices and frozen or pre-sliced fruit. E.g., fruit salads, apple sauce, date fruits, sugar palm fruit, dried cherries, raisins, strawberry purée, mixed fruit purées, dried figs/ prunes, and fruit spreads.
	Sugar g/100g	11.5	12.5	14.0	19.0	
	Fiber g/100g	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.7	
PROCESSED BEANS AND LEGUMES	Sodium g/100g	0.20	0.33	0.40	0.43	All processed and dried beans and legumes. E.g., pulses, peas, chickpeas, canned beans, soybeans, canned beans in sauce, locust beans, roasted fava beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, hummus, and fermented legumes.
	Sugar g/100g	5.7	7.5	10.0	10.5	
	Fiber g/100g	3.5	3.2	1.7	1.1	
WATER		L1	L2	L3	L4	
PLAIN WATER, TEA, AND COFFEE	Sodium g/100g	0.2	0.2			Plain or carbonated (mineral) non-flavored waters; plain tea (black or herbal); plain coffee. E.g., tap water, mineral water, espresso, americano, green tea, white tea, and black tea.
NUTS AND SEEDS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
(UN)PROCESSED NUTS AND SEEDS	SAFA g/100g	10.0	16.0	18.0	20.0	Nuts: All ground and tree nuts and fruits perceived as nuts, such as peanuts, cashew nuts, almonds, walnuts, coconuts, pecan nuts, and pistachio nuts. Raw nuts, roasted nut butters (peanut butter), and salted or otherwise processed nuts are included. Seeds: All seeds (except grains), seed butters (tahini) and kernels like sunflower seed, linseed, poppy seed, pine nuts, and sesame seeds.
	Sodium g/100g	0.100	0.425	0.550	0.725	
	Sugar g/100g	7.5	14.0	30.0	36.0	

SOURCES OF COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES		L1	L2	L3	L4	
PLAIN TUBERS USED AS STAPLE	All products without additions comply				Minimally processed, non-flavored/addition-free tubers used as staple food. E.g., peeled, sliced and/or chilled potatoes, cassava, sweet potatoes, yam, cocoyam, and taro.	
PROCESSED TUBERS USED AS STAPLE	SAFA g/100g	1.1	3.0	4.0	8.0	Types of processed tubers that are commonly used as staple food. E.g., boiled/fried (sweet) potatoes, mashed potatoes, fried cassava, cassava flour, and potato flour.
	Sodium g/100g	0.1	0.35	0.4	1.6	
	Sugar g/100g	3.0	6.5	10.0	12.0	
	Fiber g/100g	2.7	2.2	1.5	0.8	
PLAIN NOODLES AND PASTA	Sodium g/100g	0.1	0.2	0.48	0.8	All pasta and noodle products as such, without additions. E.g., plain rice noodles, egg noodles, wheat flour noodles, macaroni, and spaghetti.
	Sugar g/100g	4.0	4.2	5.0	6.0	
	Fiber g/100g	6.0	2.8	1.0	0.5	
FLAVOURED NOODLES AND PASTA	SAFA g/100g	2.0	3.5	6.5	8.0	All processed noodles and pasta with additions. E.g., shrimp or chicken flavored instant/ ready-to-eat noodles, pasta pesto, spinach pasta.
	Sodium g/100g	0.5	0.925	1.2	1.5	
	Sugar g/100g	4.0	4.2	5.0	6.0	
	Fiber g/100g	6.0	2.8	1.0	0.5	
GRAINS	SAFA g/100g	1.2	1.5	1.8	4.0	All types of (processed) grains (other than pasta, noodles, bread, and breakfast cereals). E.g., boiled, dried, unpolished rice, red/brown/black/white rice, basmati rice, whole grain rice, risotto, wheat, corn, millet, barley, sorghum, oats, flour, bulgur, pancake mixes, pizza crust.
	Sodium g/100g	0.10	0.225	0.480	1.40	
	Sugar g/100g	4.5	6.0	10.0	12.0	
	Fiber g/100g	6.0	2.8	1.0	0.5	
BREAD	SAFA g/100g	1.1	1.8	3.5	6.0	All types of bread or substitutes for bread, with the exception of breakfast cereals. E.g., wheat bread, whole meal bread, crispbreads, croissants, rye bread, cassava bread, rolls, and crackers.
	Sodium g/100g	0.32	0.40	0.48	0.85	
	Sugar g/100g	6.0	6.5	9.0	15.0	
	Fiber g/100g	6.0	2.8	1.0	0.5	
BREAKFAST CEREALS	SAFA g/100g	3.0	3.2	3.3	4.2	All types of cereal-based breakfast products. E.g., muesli, cruesli, oatmeal, cornflakes, rice crispies and porridge.
	Sodium g/100g	0.40	0.50	0.64	0.68	
	Sugar g/100g	10	14	15	26	
	Fiber g/100g	6.0	2.8	1.0	0.5	

MEAT AND ALTERNATIVES, FISH, POULTRY AND EGGS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
UNPROCESSED MEAT, POULTRY AND EGGS	SAFA g/100g	3.2	3.7	5.3	7.5	All unprocessed meat, poultry, and eggs (including frozen meat that has not undergone further processing) without additions. E.g., beef, pork, turkey, egg, game, lamb, frog legs and offal.
	Sodium g/100g	0.150	0.170	0.400	0.680	
PROCESSED MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS AND PLANT-BASED MEAT ALTERNATIVES⁵	SAFA g/100g	5	6	8	10	All types of processed meat/poultry and meat products. E.g., spiced or salted meat (fresh or frozen), sausages, meatballs, satay, fried duck, salami, smoke-dried beef, chicken nuggets, ham, and processed eggs.
	Sodium g/100g	0.450	0.600	0.680	1.300	
FRESH, FROZEN OR PROCESSED SEAFOOD	SAFA g/100g	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5	All types of unprocessed and processed seafood (from sea and freshwater): fish, crustaceans, and shellfish (including frozen, steamed, smoked, or cooked fish). Snails are also included in this product group. E.g., herring, cod (fresh or deep-frozen), eel, lobster, crab, mussel, shrimp, tilapia, catfish, carp, perch, snakehead, tuna, anchovy, sardines, mackerel, shad, milkfish, crayfish, cod parings, fried fillet of haddock, deep-fried octopus/ squid, pickled mussels, herring in tomato sauce, canned sardines, canned tuna, tempura shrimp, fish dumplings, spiced or salted fish (fresh or frozen), dried fish.
	Sodium g/100g	0.300	0.430	0.680	1.100	
INSECTS	SAFA g/100g	3.2	3.2			All edible insects and their larvae, processed or unprocessed, with or without additives. E.g., crickets, termites, mealworms, silkworms, caterpillars (products).
	Sodium g/100g	0.200	0.200			
DAIRY AND ALTERNATIVES		L1	L2	L3	L4	
MILK (-PRODUCTS) AND PLANT-BASED MILK ALTERNATIVES⁵	SAFA g/100g	1.4	1.7	2.7	6.0	All types of milk and milk products from all mammals except humans. E.g., low-fat milk, semi-skimmed milk, cottage cheese, low-fat yoghurt, semi-skimmed yoghurt, yoghurt drink, custard, fruit yoghurt, evaporated milk, coffee cream, cream (for culinary use), milk powder (reconstituted as indicated on pack) and coffee cream.
	Sugar g/100g	6.0	8.0	10.0	14.0	
CHEESE (-PRODUCTS) AND PLANT-BASED CHEESE ALTERNATIVES	SAFA g/100g	7.5	8.5	10.0	19.0	All types of solid products made from fermented milk. E.g., parmesan, cream cheese, cheddar, 20+ cheese, 30+ cheese, Emmentaler, Edam, Gouda cheese, blue cheese, gorgonzola, gruyere, soft herb cheese
	Sodium g/100g	0.400	0.500	0.600	1.200	
	Sugar g/100g				6.0	
OILS, FATS AND FAT-CONTAINING SPREADS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
OILS, FATS, SPREADS	SAFA g/100g	16.0	30.0	36.0	55.0	All types of fats and oils to be used as spreads and/or in food preparation. E.g., vegetable oil (all types), margarine, butter, oil/fat products for roasting and frying (solid or liquid).
	Sodium g/100g	0.100	0.350	0.520	0.750	

5) Plant-based alternatives need to comply with the equivalence criteria to be eligible for L1 or L2.

MEALS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
MAIN MEALS	SAFA g/100g	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	All meals consumed for breakfast, lunch, or dinner consisting of two or more components which each do not make up more than 70% of the product. E.g., pasta/rice/noodles/tubers/legumes-based meals, meal salads, burger plates, pizza, and meal kits.
	Sodium g/100g	0.240	0.340	0.400	0.525	
	Sugar g/100g	5.0	7.0	10.0	11.0	
	Fiber g/100g	2.4	1.4	1.0	0.8	
	Energy kcal/100g	190	200	225	275	
	Energy kcal/portion	600	600			
SANDWICHES AND ROLLS	SAFA g/100g	2	3	4	5	All types of ready-to-eat filled sandwiches/rolls.
	Sodium g/100g	0.450	0.570	0.620	0.800	
	Sugar g/100g	5	7	10	11	
	Fiber g/100g	2.4	1.4	1.0	0.8	
	Energy kcal/100g	190	215	225	275	
	Energy kcal/portion	350	350			
SOUPS	SAFA g/100g	1.1	2.0	3.5	4.0	A liquid food, especially with a meat, fish, or vegetable stock as a base and often containing pieces of solid food, in all preparations: ready-to-eat, chilled, canned, frozen, powdered (assessed as prepared). To be used as a meal, starter, or snack. E.g., tomato soup, mushroom soup, chicken soup.
	Sodium g/100g	0.250	0.290	0.350	0.390	
	Sugar g/100g	4.0	5.0	9.0	10.0	

Discretionary (or Non-Basic) Food Groups

SAUCES		L1	L2	L3	L4	
MEAL SAUCES	SAFA g/100g	1.1	1.3	2.5	6.0	All types of sauces that make up a substantial portion of the meal (portion size > 35g). E.g., pasta sauce, béchamel sauce, vegetable sauce, meat sauce, cheese sauce.
	Sodium g/100g	0.400	0.700	2.200	4.500	
	Sugar g/100g	6	8	16	26	
EMULSIFIED SAUCES	SAFA g/100g	3.0	4.5	6.0	8.0	All types of sauces that only make up a small portion of the meal (portion size < 35 g) and that are oil-in-water emulsions to which an emulsifying agent has been added OR which have a fat content of < 10% w/w. E.g., mayonnaise, salad dressing, dip sauce, vinaigrette.
	Sodium g/100g	0.700	1.000	1.200	1.800	
	Sugar g/100g	10	12	17	21	
	Energy kcal/100g	350	380	550	650	
DARK SAUCES	Sodium g/100g	3.000	5.500	6.500	7.750	Soy sauces, fish sauces, tamari and oyster sauces. E.g., teriyaki sauce
	Sugar g/100g	16.0	20.0	25.5	35.0	
OTHER SAUCES (WATER-BASED)	Sodium g/100g	0.750	0.800	0.900	1.080	Water-based sauces that (1) only make up a small portion of the meal (portion size < 35 g), (2) do not have an emulsifying agent, (3) have a fat content of < 10% w/w and (4) do not fall into the 'Dark sauces' category. E.g., ketchup, chocolate sauce, fruit sauce, barbecue sauce, chili sauce, marinade, mustard.
	Sugar g/100g	16.0	25.0	31.0	39.0	
	Energy kcal/100g	100	130	150	190	

SNACKS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
SAVORY SNACKS	SAFA g/100g	4.0	7.0	9.0	13.0	A product with a salty taste, used for consumption in-between meals or as a minor component of a meal.
	Sodium g/100g	0.400	0.790	0.880	1.000	
	Sugar g/100g	4.0	6.5	9.0	16.0	E.g., potato crisps, popcorn, shrimp or cheese chips, krupuk, salted sticks, beef jerky, mini pizzas, savory grain bars, fish snacks,
	Energy kcal/100g	500	535	540	570	
SWEET SNACKS	SAFA g/100g	6.0	12.0	16.5	20.0	A product with a sweet taste, used for consumption in-between meals or as a minor component of a meal.
	Sodium g/100g	0.200	0.220	0.310	0.410	
	Sugar g/100g	20	45	55	62	E.g., confectionery such as chocolate, candy bars and gummy candy, ice cream, dried fruit positioned as a snack, and baked products such as biscuits, cookies, and pastries.
	Energy kcal/100g	220	475	510	550	
LIQUIDS		L1	L2	L3	L4	
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE JUICES	Sugar g/100g	5	8	10	11	All kinds of fruit and/or vegetable juices with a minimum of 98% pure juice. E.g., orange juice, apple juice, multi-fruit juice, grape juice, berry juice, beet juice, carrot juice, tomato juice. Nb: non/low-caloric sweeteners cannot be added.
BEVERAGES	Sugar g/100g	2.5	5.5	8.0	11.5	Liquid products normally consumed from a cup, mug, or glass (incl. products packed in portions in packaging, bottles, etc.), with the exception of plain coffee/ tea/water, dairy products, milk substitutes and fruit juices. E.g., (light) soft drinks, fruit drinks, drinks containing <0.5% alcohol, and sports drinks (including powder). Note: When a beverage consists of no more than three components belonging to basic product groups, compliance with these separate components can be assessed for the corresponding product groups. When the separate components meet the criteria of the corresponding product groups, the product as such complies as well.
OTHER		L1	L2	L3	L4	
ALL OTHER PRODUCTS	SAFA g/100g	1.1	1.1			All types of food products that do not fall within any of the product groups mentioned above.
	Sodium g/100g	0.100	0.100			
	Sugar g/100g	2.500	2.500			E.g., baking product, seasonings, vinegar.

Equivalence criteria for plant-based alternatives⁶

	Protein	Ca	Fe	Zn	B2	B12
	g	mg	mg	mg	mg	µg
PLANT-BASED MILK ALTERNATIVES	2	100			0.1	0.3
PLANT-BASED MEAT ALTERNATIVES	19		1.5	2.6	0.1	1.3

6) Plant-based alternatives are assessed against the same criteria as their animal-based counterparts. A plant-based alternative is considered nutritionally equivalent if it meets the protein threshold and all but one of the qualifying micronutrient thresholds, as tabled below. If the product does not comply with these criteria, the Choices level is restricted to L3-L5.

Annexes

ANNEX I PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF NUTRIENT DEFINITIONS.

ANNEX II EXPLAINS THE PRODUCT CLASSIFICATION AND THE RULES OF CERTIFICATION AND PRESENTS THE DECISION TREE TO FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF ASSIGNING A PRODUCT TO THE CORRECT PRODUCT GROUP.

ANNEX I

Definitions of nutrients

This annex describes the definitions of nutrients and their applications for the Choices criteria.

SUGARS

All monosaccharides and disaccharides with a calorific value of >3.5 kcal/g.

CARBOHYDRATES

The carbohydrates that are metabolized by the human body. The Scientific Committee decided that considering the currently available knowledge, a criterion for glycemic load or index of a product would not be appropriate to include at this point. When comparing products with a different glycemic index or glycemic load, the Committee did agree that the use of whole grains and fiber as criteria, along with the promotion of a healthy diet, fulfils a similar role but does not get caught with a factor that is unmeasured at this point and very complex to implement.

DIETARY FIBER

Due to practical considerations, we chose to define dietary fiber as simply the total amount included on the nutrition fact panel or equivalent on the product label. This is with the recognition that country regulatory agencies deal with the definition of dietary fiber differently, many adopting the WHO 2009 definition⁷, which includes intrinsic fibers and extrinsic (i.e., added) fibers that confer physiological benefits. Some other countries use older, broader definitions of dietary fiber that includes all intrinsic and extrinsic fibers. Also, countries differ in their acceptance of the degree of polymerization 3–9 indigestible carbohydrates as dietary fiber. Nutrient

scoring systems, in general, must use total dietary fiber values that are found on product labels.

ENERGY

The amount of energy from food that is available for the metabolism by the body, expressed in kcal. The following conversion factors should be used for the calculation of the energy value:

carbohydrates	4 kcal/g
protein	4 kcal/g
fat	9 kcal/g
alcohol (ethanol)	7 kcal/g
fiber	2 kcal/g
organic acids	3 kcal/g

PORTION SIZE

The portion size of a product as indicated by the supplier (E.g. in separate packets or as indicated on packaging). When the packaging information does not clearly specify what is to be considered a portion, internationally available, standardized portion sizes are to be used.

SATURATED FATTY ACIDS (SAFA)

The sum of all types and sources of fatty acids without double conjugation.

The Scientific Committee is aware of the different roles of saturated fatty acids with different chain lengths. The definition of SAFA used in these criteria makes the criteria more conservative.

7) Nutrition and Labelling | Codex Alimentarius FAO-WHO. Available online: <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/thematic-areas/nutrition-labelling/en/>

SODIUM

Both added sodium (E.g. through salt or monosodium glutamate/MSG) and sodium that is naturally present (including sodium in yeast extract or in protein hydrolysates).

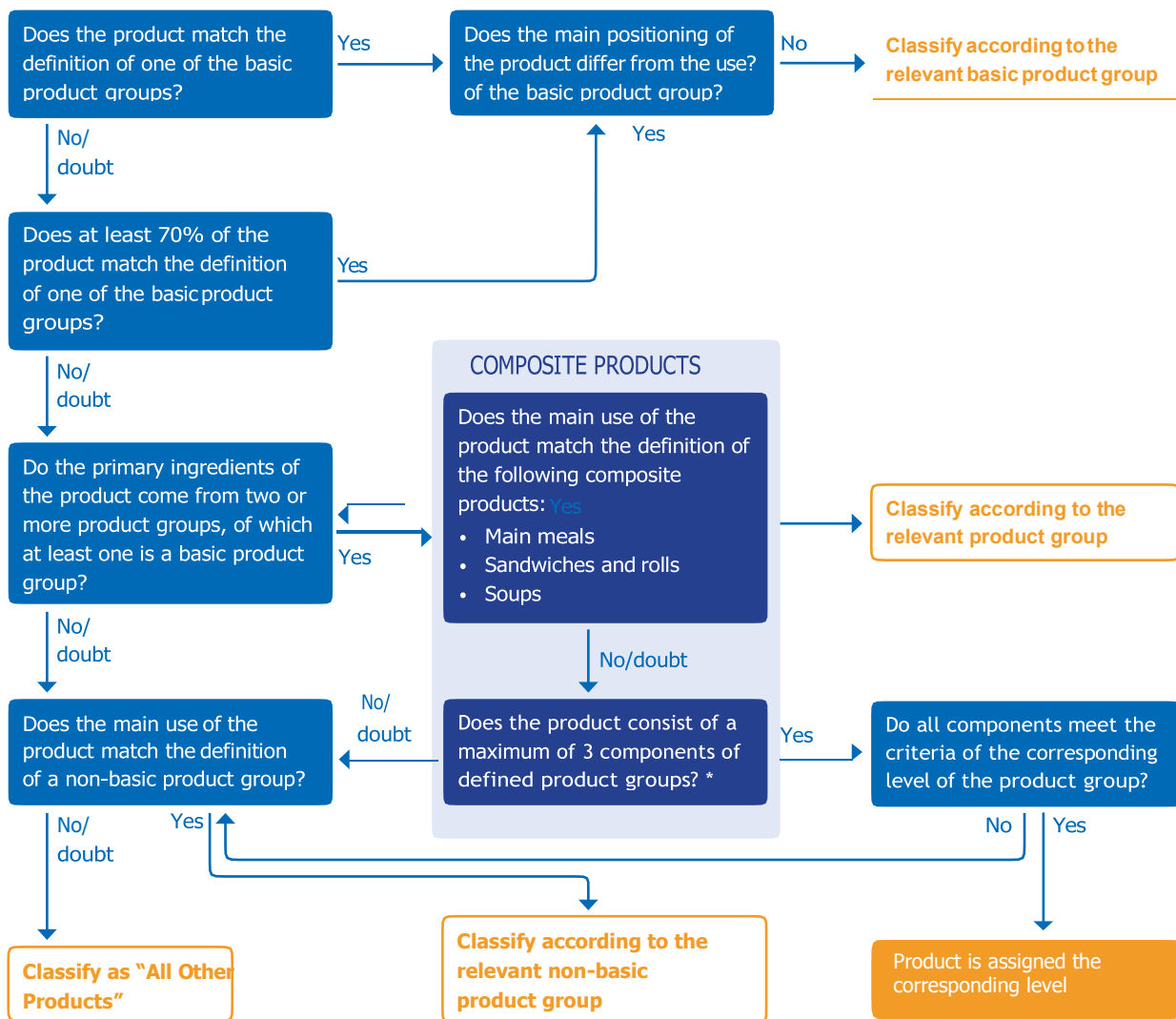
INDUSTRIALLY-PRODUCED TRANS FATTY ACIDS (iTFA)

All trans-fat other than trans-fat naturally occurring in fat of animal origin. Trans fats are defined as all the geometric isomers of mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids with non-conjugated, interrupted by at least one methylene group, double carbon-carbon conjugations in the trans-configuration.

ANNEX II

Decision tree for product group classification and certification

Products are classified in a product group according to their composition and according to their intended use. For instance, a biscuit product can be seen as a processed grain product, but if the intended use is to be consumed as a snack, it should be classified as a snack. A decision tree is created to decide which criteria to use to check for compliance.



* A component is defined as that part of the food product that could be classified in one of the Choices product groups. The remaining ingredients (such as salt or sugar) will be proportionally divided to the 2 or 3 components.

70% RULE

For a product to be assigned to a product group, it has to comply with the 70% rule: it must be made up of at least 70% of the basic raw material of the main product group. For instance, a dairy product must be made up of at least 70% dairy.

If a product consists of <70% of a component, for instance, 50% of one component and 50% of another, both components should comply with the criteria of the corresponding product groups. This can be applied to products consisting of no more than three components.

ALL OTHER PRODUCTS

If a product cannot be assigned to any of the product groups, it must be assessed according to the criteria for "all other products." If there is uncertainty about the categorization within a product group, you can contact your national foundation or the secretariat of the Choices International Foundation.

'AS SOLD' VERSUS 'AS PREPARED'

In principle, products are registered and assessed 'as sold.'

Food products may only be registered 'as prepared' if the method of preparation (rehydration/ dilution with fluid) is unambiguous and if they are dried products in powder, concentrated or condensed form. This refers to, for example, dried and concentrated soups, broths, and sauces in powder form, powdered milk, potatoes in powder form and syrups.

Additional considerations:

- Products that are to be assessed 'as prepared', are assessed after being prepared according to the standard preparation.
- The basis for this assessment must be the standard preparation method as explained on the packaging.
- The standard preparation method should be unambiguous, so that it is not subject to interpretation by consumers. For example: if the directions state that milk should be added, it should be clear whether full fat, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk should be added.
- For ingredients that during preparation are added to the product, the nutrient declaration can be calculated using the values from recognized food composition tables like the USDA Food Composition Databases.
- Variations on the standard preparation method (such as variations or suggestions for serving) are not used for the calculation of the nutrient declaration and are not allowed to be shown on the packaging.
- Serving suggestions that have a direct influence on the criteria nutrients (such as the addition of sugar or salt for taste) are not allowed.
- On-pack suggestions for food additions (such as suggestions to add pasta or rice) will not be taken into consideration.
- On some packages, advice on the preparation of the product is given. In the case of heating the product, the nutritionally preferred practice should be mentioned first. The order of preferred preparation for processed tubers is as follows (first is best): (1) Cooking, steaming, heating in oven, (2) Baking in oil, (3) Frying in oil, (4) Baking/frying in hard fats.
- Preparation advice for cooking in hard fats should be avoided.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

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