Background information about infant milks

Development of the regulation of infant milk composition

In 1974, the report *Present day practice in infant feeding* (Department of Health and Social Security, 1974) highlighted the decline in breastfeeding in the UK and the unsatisfactory composition of artificial milks then available. Following the publication in 1977 of a report on *The composition of mature human milk* (Department of Health and Social Security, 1977), which attempted to provide a basis for a compositional profile of human milk, the need for a standard for the composition of artificial milks was realised. Clear guidance on the composition of artificial feeds for the young infant were published by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1980 (Department of Health and Social Security, 1980), and in that report it was acknowledged that adequacy of artificial feeds should be assessed not only on nutrient content but also on the bioavailability of nutrients, nutrient balance and clinical and metabolic outcomes.

From 1989, legislation relating to infant milk composition has been made by the Council of Europe, and the first European Commission Directive on Infant Formulae and Follow-on Formulae was adopted in 1991. This specified the compositional and labelling requirements for milks for infants in good health during the first 4-6 months of life that all infant formulas sold in the European Union countries must comply with. Legislation was put into place in the UK in 2007, and there were some amendments to this, but from 2016 legislation on Foods for Special Groups comes into force, with delegated acts outlining the composition, labelling and marketing of infant formula, follow on formula and foods for special medical purpose. Directive EU 609/2013 came into force in the UK on July 20th 2016 as a Statutory Instrument attached to The Food Act, and highlights enforcement procedures and some basic principles, the delegated acts which came into force in February 2020 provide details on the composition, labelling and marketing of products.

For information on UK regulations see [www.bflg-uk.org](http://www.bflg-uk.org)

In addition, the Codex Alimentarius of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization also provides guidance on the composition of infant formula and these standards are used widely internationally (Codex Alimentarius Committee, 2006). Because all Codex standards must be ‘consensus’ standards, with near unanimous consent, Codex faces difficult negotiations between countries and between competing interests before recommendations can be agreed. Codex has a committee which reviews Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, and the process of agreeing standards can often be long, as compromise is preferred over voting, making meetings vulnerable to lobbying by commercial interests. Codex also produces international standards for food safety, including standards on microbiological specifications for infant formula (see [www.codexalimentarius.org](http://www.codexalimentarius.org))