



## A New Perspective

*A decade of Food in Canada reveals the increasing complexity of regulatory affairs*

The bookshelves in my office are honourably stacked with 10 years worth of *Food in Canada* magazines featuring my Regulatory Affairs column. The collection represents a time capsule of the past decade in the Canadian food business. The one trend that is certainly most evident is that the food business and the laws that govern it are more complex today than they were a decade ago.

When *Food in Canada* comes in the mail it is a must read. Even though there's no surprise in what I have written, it always looks so fresh when it's in print. Every now and then my daughter, who is 10, peeks over my shoulder as I read and reminds me of the obvious – how much older I look now. I tell her that's because of the job. Regulations and compliance are demanding, insanely detailed, very unforgiving, and the only certainty is that you'll get older, perhaps a bit wiser, but definitely older.

From time to time faithful readers have let me know their different points of view. It's fascinating how sometimes very subtle differences in understanding can dramatically change perspectives. Regulations are often dimensional, meaning they cannot be appreciated from just one perspective, just as it's not possible to see all sides of a square at the same time. How regulations apply to particular situations can be far more colourful than the black ink of written words. In fact, a single word can make a world of difference. Reading regulations over and over again in an attempt to better understand them is quite normal, as rarely is everything absorbed all at once. Reading the same regulation and formulating contrasting opinions from those of your colleagues is also normal. Discovering situations and contexts that challenge their former understanding is part of their mystique. It's all part of fine-tuning interpretive skills. What is certain is that those who fail to recognize "perspective" will likely end up being wrong more often than right.

Hopefully, the articles I've written have added, and will continue to add, a bit of perspective.

Readers have also commented that certain points should perhaps be further explained – and they're usually right.

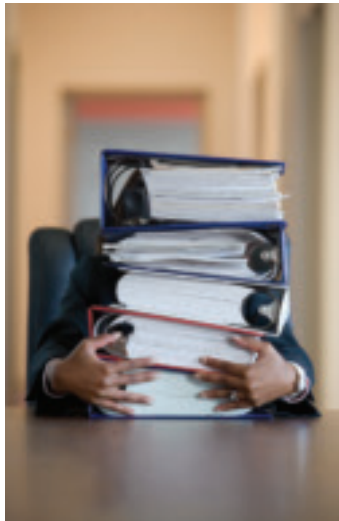
Having only 700 words to explain obtuse regulatory concepts in plain English is a fun challenge. Writing about the new Canadian nutrition labelling is a fine example of that. Long windedness and convolution are the main ingredients in regulations – how many times do you get just a yes or no answer to a regulatory question? Food law, as I have come to appreciate it, was not meant to be understood!

I am also amazed at how far *Food in Canada* travels. In the past I have had a number of researchers, professors, regulatory and legal professionals contact me from around the world. One time a Greek professor apologized for asking questions about one of my articles several months after its publication, as he only gets the publication second hand. A similar situation happened again with a researcher in Poland. All I can say is that questions are always appreciated.

In a strange bit of irony, the evolution of a more complex food business is followed closely by less time available to be dedicated to this increasing complexity. To compound matters even more, the continuity in the industry's knowledge base is not being sustained as people retire. From a compliance perspective this doesn't look good. The only consolation is that government is in the same boat. So if no one can figure out that things are wrong, they must be right. I hope to continue adding a bit of regulatory know-how in future articles.

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