



# DBN Review N° 6.1

A resource about dairy-based nutrition  
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This review explains the current legislation that governs fat classification of dairy products and describes what the different fat classes mean.

A publication for health professionals

## Fat classes of dairy



A reclassification of dairy products in South Africa was introduced in April 2016. An expert of the Dairy Standards Agency summarises the changes in and implications of the regulation briefly.

What fat classes are described for dairy products?



Class designation	Previous legislation Regulation 2581 (1987)	New legislation Regulation 260 (2015)	
	Fat content	Fat content	Alternative class designation
High-fat milk	At least 4.5%	More than 4.5%	
Full-fat milk	At least 3.3%	3.3–4.5%	Full-cream milk Whole milk Milk
Medium-fat milk	Not in regulation	1.5–3.3%	x% medium-fat milk x% medium-cream milk
Low-fat milk	At least 1.5%, but not more than 2.5%	0.5–1.5%	Low-fat milk
Fat-free milk	Not more than 0.5%	Not more than 0.5%	Skimmed milk

### What is the protein content of the different fat classes?

Regulation 260 stipulates a minimum protein content of 3% calculated on a fat-free basis. The protein content can vary between 3.2% and 3.4% across the different types of milk.

### What is the carbohydrate content of milk?

The carbohydrate in milk is called lactose. Typically, the lactose content of milk is 4.8%, but it can range between 4.7% and 5.0% across the different types of milk.

### What has changed in the revised regulation of the fat classes of dairy?

Most notably a separate class for medium-fat dairy has been introduced. Products in this class have a fat content of 1.5–3.3%. Previously, low-fat milk was classified as having a

fat content of between 0.5% and 2.5%. Low-fat milk is now described as having a fat content of between 0.5% and 1.5%. So-called 2% milk will therefore no longer be classified as 'low-fat', but rather as 2% medium-fat milk or 2% medium-cream milk, as per the alternative class designation (see table). The new fat classes will give consumers more choice when buying dairy products.

### Does the new regulation apply to yoghurt and cheese?

The revision of the fat class designation also affects most other dairy product categories. Regulation 260 provides specific standards for dairy products such as milk, buttermilk, cultured milk (*maas*), yoghurt, drinking yoghurt, cottage cheese, evaporated milk and condensed milk. This will essentially lead to the reclassification of some products formerly labelled as 'low-fat'.

## Why was the regulation revised?

Dairy product labelling in South Africa is an interesting and striking example of the complexities facing an entire industry, and of the power relationships – or diverging interests – among government departments, dairy processors and distributors, and food retailers. In a complex food market, it is difficult to achieve balance among the stakeholders' various needs, which explains why it often takes long to amend regulatory labelling measures.

The revision of Regulation 2581 of 1987 (Regulations relating to dairy and imitation dairy products in terms of the Agricultural Product Standards Act, 1990 [Act 119 of 1990]) is a typical example of such a process. The changes come as a result of many factors, such as technological advances, new product innovation through research and development, fragmentation and the need for aligning legislation with national and international standards.

Furthermore, in line with health legislation and international standards, the claim 'low fat' cannot be made for liquid products such as milk if the total fat content is higher than 1.5% and in the case of solid food products if the total fat content is higher than 3%. The amendment therefore had to be made to adhere to these standards and to prevent technical trade barriers (South Africa is a member of the World Trade Organization and therefore has to subscribe to the rules of fair international trade.)

## By when did companies have to comply with the new regulation?

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) confirmed 28 March 2016 as the implementation date for the new dairy and imitation dairy regulations (R260), published in the Government Gazette on 27 March 2015.

However, companies were required to be fully compliant with the requirements of the new regulation by 30 September 2016. DAFF inspectors were instructed to proceed directly to issuing seizures of dairy products and imitation dairy products that do not comply with the requirements of Regulation R260 after that date.

### **Also read:**

**Review N° 6.2:** Saturated fatty acids in dairy: Beware of oversimplification

**Review N° 6.3:** Health implications of trans-fatty acids in dairy

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