

HEAD OFFICE

4 Carnavon Street
Private Mail Bag
GPO, Suva
Phone - General Office: 3300792, 3310183
Chief Executive Officer: 3305864
Fax: 3300115 | Email: complaints@consumersfiji.org

LAUTOKA/West

Suite 4 Popular Building
Vidilo Street
PO Box 5396, Lautoka
Phone: 6664987 | Fax: 6652846
Email: consumerltk@connect.com.fj

LABASA/North

Level 1, Lot 41 Raza Properties Ltd
Nasekula Road
PO Box 64, Labasa
Phone: 8812559 | Fax: 8812559
Email: colbs@connect.com.fj

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Feature Article

Shrinking Products

Part I

Did you know that items such as garlic, potatoes, onions, soap and other perishable goods can actually dry out and lose weight (shrink) while sitting in the supermarkets and grocery store shelves?

The percentage of loss of products between manufacture and point of sale is referred to as shrinkage or shrink.

Many consumers do not have the option of weighing their items and checking whether it has the same volume as stated on the product label. Normally, the consumers are sold the shrunken products at its actual stated price. What most consumers do not know is that items which shrink in size have **a permissible size of deficiency**.

Issues relating to weights and measures are regulated by the National Trade and Measurement Decree 1989 and are monitored by the Department of National Trade Measurement & Standards at the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

According to the *National Trade and Measurement (Prepacked Articles) (Packaging) Regulations 1989*, maximum deficiency on a package of product can be of only 5% which also includes perishable items. This is the **permissible deficiency** after day of packaging.

For instance, if you buy 500 grams pre-packed garlic, which after weighing at the counter comes to 475 grams then the supermarket selling the items has not contravened the above Decree. But, if the garlic weighs 470 grams then it is in breach of the legislation. As a result, the garlic should be priced according to the current weight of the items (470grams) and not charged the same price for 500 grams. **The garlic needs to be re-weighed and priced. This becomes the responsibility of the retailers, since they are the end seller of the product.**

Those consumers who are not wary of this do not usually know their rights and responsibilities when it comes to permissible deficiency. The Consumer Council of Fiji has received concerns from numerous consumers via emails, social network site and phone calls, stating that shops are selling items with incorrect weight labels.

Something similar happened to Philip:

Case Study

Philip picked up a *number 14* chicken from a well-known supermarket in Suva and decided to weigh it. Upon weighing, he found the chicken to be 20grams less than its actual weight of 1.4kg on the label.

He weighed a few other *number 14* chickens and found them to be lesser in weight. A fretful Philip did not purchase the chicken but chose to voice his concern with the Council requesting the Council to check the weight of the items in the shop.

The Council advised Philip that some products have an allowable shrinkage or shortage in weight due to moisture loss, dryness and evaporation. By virtue of Regulations 42 and 43 of the *National Trade and Measurement (Prepacked Articles) (Packaging) Regulations 1989*, chicken has a permissible deficiency of 5 percent, that is a 5percent loss in weight is allowed.

In other words, the number 14 chicken which weighs approximately 1.4kg can have a permissible deficiency of 70g. That is, after shrinkage it can weigh around 1.33kg.

The Council carried out a survey of items in the said supermarket to find out that *they had a few frozen chickens which weighed lower than the permitted deficiency percentage.*

The retailer immediately removed the chicken from public display.

In consideration of the above, it is important for consumers to actually weigh items which can shrink in size. The Council also expects traders/packers to make allowances for any expected losses in the weight of the item when packaging for the entirety of its shelf if the item is likely to lose weight over time through evaporation, dehydration or other means. The consumer deserves to get what he/she pays for.

There are different permissible deficiencies for different products. **Read more about these products, next week.**