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# Germany will curb vague green claims on food labels starting Sept. 27

Under new EU rules, terms like “sustainable” will require recognized proof across packaging, advertising and voluntary seals.

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Germany will begin applying stricter limits on environmental marketing for food products on Sept. 27, under new European Union rules that sharply narrow when companies can describe products as “sustainable,” “environmentally friendly,” or “climate-friendly.”

The Federal Center for Nutrition, known by its German initials BZfE, said the new standards will apply across the EU from that date and will also cover food advertising. Germany has already written the requirements into national law through changes to its Act Against Unfair Competition.

At the center of the change is the legal treatment of what the rules call a general environmental claim. That category includes written, spoken, or audiovisual statements about environmental benefits that are not explained on the same medium where the claim appears, such as directly on packaging or in the same commercial. In practice, that means broad terms such as “green,” “nature-friendly,” or “ecological” will no longer be allowed unless they are backed by what the rules describe as recognized outstanding environmental performance.

According to the BZfE, that standard can be met through requirements tied to an official environmental label or through provisions set by EU law. For organic products, the requirements of the EU’s organic regulation can also serve as the basis for certain descriptions. The agency said that means organic products may still be described as “biological” or “ecological” when those terms are supported by the existing organic rules.

The changes come from the EU’s Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition directive, formally Directive (EU) 2024/825. The measure is meant to give consumers stronger protection against misleading sustainability claims at the point of sale and in advertising. The BZfE said the goal is to make shopping decisions depend less on how “green” a product appears and more on whether the promised environmental benefit can actually be proven.

The rules also address a common marketing practice in which a company highlights an environmental advantage in only one part of a product and then extends that claim to the whole item. Under the new framework, that will not be allowed. The BZfE gave the example of packaging: a more environmentally friendly package does not justify advertising the entire food product as environmentally friendly.

Another major change affects voluntary sustainability seals. Those labels will be allowed only if they are based on a certification system with independent monitoring or if they have been established by a public authority. Seals that do not meet those conditions may no longer be used.

The BZfE also said claims such as “climate neutral” will not be permitted when they rely on the offsetting of greenhouse gas emissions. That point is likely to draw attention from companies that have used carbon compensation as the basis for environmental messaging in recent years.

The new requirements will not be limited to newly launched goods. They will also apply to products already on the market. The BZfE said there is no general transition period and no general sell-through period for existing stock. That means companies that still use broad environmental language or unsupported seals on packaging, websites, or advertising materials may need to make immediate changes before the rules take effect.

Businesses that fail to comply could face more than criticism from consumers. The BZfE warned that violations may lead to sanctions as well as reputational damage.

Although the guidance is framed around food, the impact could also reach drinks makers that use environmental claims on bottles, cans, cartons, and promotional campaigns. Breweries, wineries, spirits producers, and soft drink companies that market products as “sustainable” or use private eco-style seals may need to review whether those statements are tied to verifiable standards and whether claims about packaging are being extended too far to the drink itself. For some companies, that could mean higher compliance costs and changes to label design and advertising copy.

The tighter approach reflects a broader shift in Europe toward stricter policing of green marketing. Under the new standard, simple environmental language will no longer be enough on its own. Companies will need to show that a claim rests on recognized criteria, and they will need to make sure the scope of the claim matches the part of the product that actually delivers the environmental benefit.

The BZfE said the changes are intended to make sustainability communication clearer for shoppers and to reduce confusion caused by vague or overstated claims. In the food aisle, and potentially across related drink categories, environmental messaging that once passed as standard marketing will now face a much higher bar.