

Definition of Food Cultures

Food cultures (FC) are safe¹ live bacteria, yeasts or filamentous fungi (moulds) used in food production which are in themselves a food ingredient. FC preparations are formulations, consisting of concentrates ($> 10^8$ CFU/g or ml for bacteria and yeasts and $> 10^7$ CFU/g for filamentous fungi) one or more live and active microbial strains of one or more microbial species, including unavoidable metabolites and media components carried over from the fermentation and components (e.g., carbohydrates, organic acids, minerals, vitamins) which are necessary for their survival, storage and to facilitate their application in the food.

FC includes, but is not limited to the terms: starter cultures, dairy starter, yoghurt starters, ripening cultures, meat cultures, sausage starter, wine cultures, plant-based starters, malolactic cultures, sourdough starter, probiotics, lactic acid bacteria, etc.²

FC preparations are used as food ingredients at one or more stages in the food manufacturing process to develop their desired metabolic activity. They contribute to one or multiple unique properties of food especially in regard to flavour, colour, texture, microbial quality, wholesomeness, health and nutritional benefits and food safety through protection and conservation.

Labelling of food with FC

Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 provides the information which shall be included in the labelling of all foods, allowing consumers to make an informed choice.

As FCs are defined as food ingredients, they should be listed on the ingredient label of the final food when they are used in the manufacture or preparation of a foodstuff, unless exempted by another regulation. FC must be in the list of ingredients under a generally understood category name or in certain cases the specific species and/or strain name. According to Article 19 1(d) of Regulation 1169/2011 cheese, butter, fermented milk and cream are exempted from carrying a list of ingredients if no other ingredient than lactic products, enzymes and FCs essential to manufacture, or the salt needed for the manufacture of cheese has been added.³

¹ Bourdichon, F. et al., Bulletin of the IDF No. 514/2022, [Inventory of microbial food cultures with safety demonstration in food products](#), pp. 1-175.

² Please refer to EFFCA's "Safety assessment and characterisation of food cultures" guidance document for more information.

³ Please refer to EFFCA's "Industry guidance for quality, safety, effectiveness, and labelling of food cultures" for more information.