

FOOD LABELING

WHEN NUTRITION SCIENCE MEETS POLITICAL SCIENCE: The incentive for food companies created by the French food label Nutri-Score represents a “government totalitarian policy,” said Pietro Paganini, co-founder of sustainable nutrition consultancy Competere and adjunct assistant professor at John Cabot University. Paganini was speaking at an event on [food labeling](#) Tuesday, hosted by Competere and Euractiv, where the debate about the role of technology in helping consumers make healthy choices quickly descended into a fiery dispute over the controversial front-of-pack labeling system.

The panel, which also included Green MEP Michèle Rivasi, Renew MEP Véronique Trillet-Lenoir, Ramon Estruch Riba from the University of Barcelona and Friedrich Trosse of small business lobby group SMEunited, debated the health merits and efficacy of front-of-pack labeling and its potential impact on businesses.

Traffic light totalitarianism: The crux of the argument, however, was over the role of government. The two MEPs, both from France, argued that Nutri-Score helps everyone — even those lacking education on nutrition — to make healthier choices and encourages food companies to make healthier products. “Pushing all companies to move towards green,” countered Pagani, is “basically a government totalitarian policy.” He later added that “200 years after [philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich] Hegel and the totalitarian state,” Europe should be moving in a direction where “citizens can exercise their critical thinking and make their personal choice.”

Automated nutrition: Paganini also argued that technology that allows an individualized approach to health (such as smart watches) should be embraced, rather than “wasting time” with Nutri-Score. “It’s big brother to me,” said Trillet-Lenoir, before clarifying that she is very interested in technology and medicine but “right now, we are far away from this nice fiction.”