

Roberts 'digestion boost bloomers'

ASA Complaint Reference A19-1023171

The Real Bread Campaign believes that the online advertising for Roberts digestion boost bloomer range is misleading and in breach of rules 3.1, 3.2 and 3.9 of the BCAP code.

The company advertises that: 'Our new Digestion Boost Bloomers are yummy, scrummy and friendly on your tummy. They are packed with fibre and calcium, to complement a healthy gut. They are also lovingly created with organic live ferments, What's more, they contain no artificial preservatives and we've taken out a lot of the additives you'd find in other loaves.'

We believe that the average consumer will understand that this product is made using a live sourdough starter culture. Branded and supermarket own-brand wrapped, sliced loaves of genuine sourdough Real Bread are now available and we believe shoppers are likely to understand Roberts 'live ferment' claim as a clear statement that the advertised product and its manufacture is one of those that is materially different to other industrial loaves. Furthermore, as awareness of sourdough fermentation moves further into the mainstream, people who are aware that the process may be beneficial likely to understand that these apply to these Robert's product. More generally, advertising and coverage in traditional and social media of foods including live yoghurt, sauerkraut, kimchi and kefir has raised consumer awareness of known and potential benefits of 'live ferments'. We believe that people will understand Roberts use of the term to mean that one or more of these will apply to these loaves, or at least they are in some way 'better' than other loaves.

We also believe that people will understand the 'digestion boost' and 'tummy friendly' claims to mean that these products offer benefits not generally offered, or offered at all, by bread or other industrial loaves.

We contacted the company to ask: if by 'live ferment' they mean that the product is made using a live sourdough starter culture; for how long the final dough is fermented; if (in place of the additives it claims to have removed) it uses so called 'processing aids' that are not declared on the label; if these loaves are simply made by the Chorleywood Process, or variant thereof; and what differentiates products in this range from other products that allows it to claim or imply they are better for digestion.

The company's technical compliance controller responded without giving us direct answers to any of our questions, though did write: "we do not make reference or inference to sour dough or bulk fermentation so not sure on what basis your question is asked?" She also wrote: "we deal with processing aids in line with the Food Labelling Act 1990." From this we take it the company uses one or more of these but (legally) chooses not to declare them on the label or in its advertising. We believe that consumers seeing 'taken out a lot of the additives' will not understand this to mean that declared additives have been replaced by undeclared 'processing aids'.

We believe that the advertised products are, in fact, industrial loaves manufactured by the high-speed Chorleywood Process (known in the industry as a 'no-time' process). This is supported by the use of baker's yeast and E300, both used in this process but not in a traditional sourdough method. Even they are made using a live starter culture, any beneficial changes that may take place in dough during long fermentation by a traditional sourdough method simply cannot happen in the hour or so the final dough is allowed to rise in modern manufacture. As for any benefits of consuming 'live ferments', the organisms present in a sourdough starter culture are killed during baking.

We question the appropriateness of the 'live ferment' reference, whether these loaves boost digestion more than other loaves, or are more 'tummy friendly', and believe it is disingenuous to boast of removing additives without admission that it now uses undeclared 'processing aids' instead. We also ask if it has the certification necessary to use the word 'organic' in its marketing.