LanguaL

LanguaL is a faceted food description language that was originally developed by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for food safety purposes. It has been further developed in Europe for use in food composition tables and databases. It is a software system which allows describing foods in a standardized manner. Each food is assigned a set of descriptors, using standardized language, from the following facets: product type; food source; part of plant or animal; physical state, shape, or form; extent of heat treatment; cooking method; treatment applied; preservation method; packing medium; container or wrapping; food contact surface; consumer group/dietary use; geographical places and regions; and adjunct characteristics.

If the factor term for a food is not known or does not apply for a food, the terms "unknown" and "not applicable" may be used. LanguaL is designed to contain as much information as possible about the food without leaving room for questionable assumptions. Only those descriptors that pertain to a food need to be used. For internal storage and processing, factor terms are assigned alphanumeric codes. To facilitate retrieval and aggregation, the descriptors within each facet are arrayed in a hierarchy from broader to narrower terms. The vocabulary includes definitions for the terms and explains when and in what contexts they should be used. The LanguaL thesaurus includes cross references for synonyms and Latin names, and for preferred, broader, narrower, and related terms.

LanguaL is currently used within the EuroFIR project (http://www.eurofir.org) as one of the main elements in connecting various databases. Once the foods in databases are described according to the interface, databases may be queried and information may be retrieved. The more accurate the descriptions of the foods, the more informative are the searches and retrievals.

More detailed information and the software can be found at the LanguaL website http://www.langual.org.