
Guidance on unit pricing

Préconisations concernant l'indication des prix à l'unité

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Project Committee ISO/PC 294, *Guidance on unit pricing*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Unit pricing is the display of the price of a product per standard unit of measure. For example, a 500 g bag of rice offered at \$2,00 would display a unit price of \$4,00 per kg. A 2 kg bag of rice offered at \$7,00 would display a unit price of \$3,50 per kg. It may be provided for packaged products (containing constant or variable quantities) or non-packaged products. Unit pricing provides consumers with a base price with which to compare like items of different sizes and brands. It can greatly reduce confusion and help consumers make better informed choices, especially when there are a multitude of products, brands and package sizes.

This document is intended to improve the accuracy and usability of unit pricing for consumers. It offers retailers, policy makers and other stakeholders guidance for establishing best practice for providing and displaying the unit price of products, including what unit prices are and how they are to be used, by

- defining unit pricing systems and the types of labels and promotions to which they may apply,
- assisting improvements to current unit pricing, and
- enhancing transparency of pricing information to consumers.

Consumers use unit pricing when it is made available. It is useful as a price comparison tool as a way of identifying products that offer the best value for money. Sustained usage across time is supported when there is periodic education or reminder communications.

There are other benefits for consumers, retailers and manufacturers.

- Providing consumers with better tools to compare prices is especially helpful where package sizes change and retail prices remain the same. Consumers are also better able to consistently determine actual price savings when “sale” items are effectively marked with unit pricing.
- Increased consumer satisfaction, improved pricing accuracy, increased sales of retailer branded products and, depending on the jurisdiction, removal of the need to display the selling price on each item of packaged product.

NOTE Retailer branded products refers to products marketed and sold under a retailer’s brand name or a brand name not associated with any proprietary manufacturer, e.g. private label, house brand, retailer brand.

- One strategy governments have used to help consumers compare prices is to introduce standardized container size regulations for selected common food and consumer products such as cosmetics and processed food products. Unit pricing is a much less complex and onerous method for manufacturers and retailers to implement; its introduction has led some jurisdictions to reject, reduce or eliminate standard package size regulations as a policy solution.

This document was developed to provide guidance on best practices for retailers or governments wishing to introduce voluntary or mandatory unit pricing systems and to help improve existing voluntary or mandatory unit pricing systems to ensure that consumers are provided with information that is easy to notice, read, understand and use.

The guidance provided here is intended to be adaptable depending on the size and level of maturity of an organization’s management system and on the context, nature and complexity of the organization’s activities, including its compliance policy and objectives.

Guidance on unit pricing

1 Scope

This document gives principles and best practice guidelines for unit pricing displayed by written, printed or electronic means.

It includes guidance on

- the provision of unit price,
- units of measure used to express unit price including: weight, length, volume, count, area and other forms of measure,
- the display of unit price, and
- implementation, communication and education of consumers.

This document is applicable to any retailer, including supermarkets, hardware stores, pharmacies, convenience stores, automotive parts suppliers and pet product suppliers.

It is applicable to packaged and non-packaged food and consumer products where the price is displayed, including

- at point of sale, including in-store and online, and
- when relevant communications about the product are released (including advertising by electronic and printed formats).

This document excludes services and merchandise, such as clothing and electronic goods sold as a single item.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

constant measure package

products that are packaged items of a particular type containing the same quantity

EXAMPLE One litre packs of milk.

3.2

consumer

individual member of the general public purchasing food and products for private purposes

**3.3
label**

information attached or adjacent to the product

EXAMPLE Sign, sticker, stamp, tag.

**3.4
non-packaged product**

product that has not been packed prior to being offered for sale and where the price paid is dependent on the quantity chosen

**3.5
packaged product**

product that has been packed prior to being offered for sale

**3.6
organization**

company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority or institution, person or persons or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private, that has its own functions and administration with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

Note 1 to entry: This definition includes retailers, manufacturers, sole-traders, partnership, charities, etc.

**3.7
selling price**

price per item or, in the case of *non-packaged products* (3.4), the price per unit of measure at which the products are offered for sale

Note 1 to entry: In some countries, taxes are not included in the indicated price but are added at the time of purchase.

**3.8
special offer**

offer of products that vary from the regular offer, including, but not limited to, bundles of like or unlike products and sizes, temporary price reductions, free gifts or extra quantities, and offered and perishable products close to their use-by date

**3.9
unit price**

price of a defined/specified unit of measure of a product, including weight (e.g. price per 100 g), volume (e.g. price per 100 ml), length, area and number, and the unit of measure used

Note 1 to entry: Also known as comparison price and base price.

**3.10
unit pricing**

system used to provide the *unit price* (3.9) of a product per unit of measure

4 Objective

The objective of this document is to encourage and facilitate the effective provision by retailers of the unit price of products and the effective use of this information by consumers to make informed decisions. It is intended to improve the accessibility, accuracy and usability of unit pricing for consumers.

5 Main principles

5.1 General

Effective unit pricing is most likely to be achieved by applying several key principles to the design, introduction and operation of unit pricing systems. These principles should be used whenever a relevant product is offered for sale or advertised at a price, which is displayed by written, printed or electronic means, and a suitable measurement is available to indicate the unit price.

5.2 Provision

The unit price should be provided whenever a relevant product is offered for sale or advertised at a price, which is displayed by written, printed or electronic means, and a suitable measurement is available to indicate the unit price.

The unit price should be provided in a manner to meet the needs of all consumers, including those with special needs or vulnerable groups. For example, shelf labels that are angled or designed for greater ease of reading.

5.3 Units of measure

The unit of measure used to indicate the unit price should be appropriate for the product and easy for consumers to use. Whenever possible, only one unit of measure should be used for a product type.

5.4 Displaying unit price

The unit price should be displayed to ensure the greatest possible noticeability and legibility for all potential consumers, including those with special needs or vulnerable groups. This can be achieved by taking into account display characteristics, such as print density, font size, font type, colour and contrast, and white space.

5.5 Consistency

There should be the highest possible level of consistency, within and between retailers and across all retail formats, in the provision and display of unit pricing and in the units of measure used.

5.6 Planning, implementing and monitoring

Planning and implementing unit pricing should involve an adequate process of promotion, development, monitoring, maintenance and improvement. An organization's unit pricing system should operate in a manner that aligns with the guidance included in this document.

5.7 Communication

Information about unit pricing should be communicated to all stakeholders (e.g. consumers, consumer organizations, retailers, manufacturers, wholesalers, IT vendors, governments) via targeted communication in the stakeholder's language and with a strong focus on relevant benefits (see [Annex A](#)).

5.8 Consumer education

Consumer education should meet the needs of both experienced and inexperienced consumers and include what unit pricing is, where it is provided, how to use it and potential benefits. It should be ongoing with periodic reminder programmes.

6 Provision of unit price

6.1 General

The unit price should be provided wherever the selling price of a product is displayed in written, printed electronic and digital forms, regardless of whether it is in-store, online or in advertisements. This includes when

- products are in packages, including when the selling price is the same as the unit price,
- products are non-packaged, and
- products are on special offer.

The unit price should be calculated on the selling price of the total product(s) on offer. The calculation includes any extra quantity of the same product offered for “free”.

When the selling price is displayed on a package, both the selling price and the unit price should be displayed together.

6.2 Consistency of provision of unit price

The objective of this document is more likely to be achieved by the adoption of consistent provision of unit price

- within a retailer,
- across retailers,
- across all retail formats (including in-store and online),
- between packaged products and non-packaged products, and
- across all forms of advertising .

6.3 Special offers

When designing and developing special offers, high priority should be given to the provision of unit price prior to implementation.

For special offers, where the selling price is displayed, the unit price should be displayed in accordance with [Clause 8](#).

Special offers combining multiple items in one offer should provide the unit price for both the entire multi-offer and per single unit, to allow direct comparison with other single items.

7 Units of measure

7.1 General

It is essential for both consumers and organizations that the correct and appropriate unit of measure is established. The decision on which unit of measure to use should be made before the unit price provision begins. The success of unit pricing relies on the following factors.

- An established measurement system. The relevant units of measurement for the jurisdiction should be used to indicate the unit price.
- Using only one unit of measure for each product category or class of products (e.g. where a non-packaged vegetable is sold at a price per kilogram, the packaged vegetable should be unit-priced per kilogram).

- Using the most commonly used form of measurement for similar product categories (e.g. a unit of weight or a count number). This measure should be well understood by consumers and appropriate for the product category.
- Using only one commonly used unit of measure when a package is labelled with more than one unit of measure (e.g. weight and count). For example, in some cases packaged tea bags declare count and weight. If the commonly used unit of measure for tea bags is weight, then the unit price should be displayed per unit of weight (e.g. 100 g).
- Using a unit pricing system whereby the denomination of the unit of measure should not result in extremely small or large unit prices.

7.2 Consistency of measure

The units of measure used to unit price products should achieve the maximum possible consistency between

- products and methods of sale,
- advertising methods,
- retailers and jurisdictions, and
- within individual retailers.

7.3 Measurement and calculation

7.3.1 Accuracy

The calculation of the unit price should be accurate and based on the currently displayed selling price.

7.3.2 Rounding

An organization should accurately and consistently use the same method of rounding of unit prices, where applicable and in a way that does not mislead the consumer. Rounding should be in accordance with the currency of the jurisdiction and consumer needs. An unnecessarily large number of decimal places should be avoided (e.g. \$1,27 per kg rather than \$1,273 5 per kg).

8 Displaying unit price

8.1 General

How unit price information is displayed in-store, online and in advertisements has a major impact on consumer use. Effective display enables consumers to easily notice, read and understand unit prices (see [Annex B](#)). To achieve this, account should be taken of various factors, including those that relate to consumers with special needs.

8.2 Location (proximity to selling price)

The display location of the unit price should be below or otherwise adjacent to the selling price. Where possible, the unit price should be the information that is the closest to the selling price.

Advertising (including in catalogues, newspapers and online) should display the unit price of an item adjacent to the selling price in accordance with this document. This helps consumers compare unit prices across stores.

8.3 Font type

The font type selected for the unit price should be clear and easy to notice and read (e.g. bold). Organizations should avoid using italics, underlining, and thin or compressed font types as these styles make it harder to read the unit price.

8.4 Font size

The unit price should be displayed using the largest practical font size possible. When the selling price font size is increased (e.g. on promotional labels), the size of the unit price font should be proportionately increased.

The unit price font size intended for consumer use should be more prominent than information intended for the retailer only (e.g. barcode, product position, supplier number, product code).

8.5 Colour and contrast

Black text on a white background is recommended for maximum contrast.

A coloured background can be used to enhance noticeability of unit price information, but should not reduce legibility of the unit price. The use of coloured text for the unit price information should be avoided.

8.6 White space

White space should be used around the unit price. Mixing the unit price with other text should be avoided.

8.7 Border(s) and box

The use of border(s) or a box around the unit price can increase its noticeability. These should be used on labels with limited white space to help consumers notice the unit price.

8.8 Expression of "unit price"

If the words "unit price" or equivalent are provided they should be placed adjacent to the unit price.

8.9 Obscuring

The unit price should not be obscured by product(s), holders around shelf labels or price signs, etc.

8.10 Format

To facilitate consumer awareness and use, the unit price should be shown in a consistent way based on each country's grammatical order and normal practice (e.g. \$1,03 per 100 g, \$1,03/100 g or 100 g = \$1,03).

8.11 Symbols and abbreviations

Symbols and abbreviations used to indicate units of measure should be easily understood by consumers. Abbreviations for units should follow the standard abbreviations as outlined in this document, see [Annex C](#).

To aid consumer understanding, a word (e.g. "per") or a symbol (e.g. "/") should be used to indicate the unit price. The chosen method should be used consistently.

8.12 Monetary denomination

The unit price should be expressed in the most appropriate denomination, for the product category (e.g. \$1,03 per kg not 103 cents per kg). Chosen monetary denominations should be used consistently and the currency symbol should be included (e.g. \$0,34 per 100 ml not 0,34 per 100 ml).

8.13 Consistency of displaying unit price

The same principles should be used consistently to display unit price information on all labels within a store, across stores and across store formats and all forms of advertising.

8.14 Non-ambiguity

The unit price should be displayed to ensure clarity of meaning and to avoid confusion with any other displayed information.

9 Provision and display in-store

9.1 General

The price label text on some shelves in a store is less legible than others, e.g. the bottom or top shelves. Unit price provision on such shelves should follow additional rules for making the unit price legible.

9.2 Lower shelves in-store

Consideration should be given to providing larger unit price labels on the lower shelves as compared to unit price labels on higher shelves. This will allow for larger fonts to be printed for viewing at greater or lower distances.

9.3 Viewing distance and angle

Legibility and prominence of unit prices on labels on lower or higher shelves may be enhanced by

- being angled appropriately, and
- having a larger font size than those at eye level.

An example illustration is given in [Figure 1](#).

9.4 Surface reflection

Surface reflection of the labels should be avoided by choosing a non-reflective finish.

10 Provision and display online

When elements of [Clause 8](#) cannot be used online, to achieve the best unit price display a combination of the other elements should be used and enhanced.

Unit prices are more easily accessible when the unit price is shown on every page in a consistent manner across the website.

In conjunction with an effective product search function, it is important that consumers are given the ability to sort products by unit price.

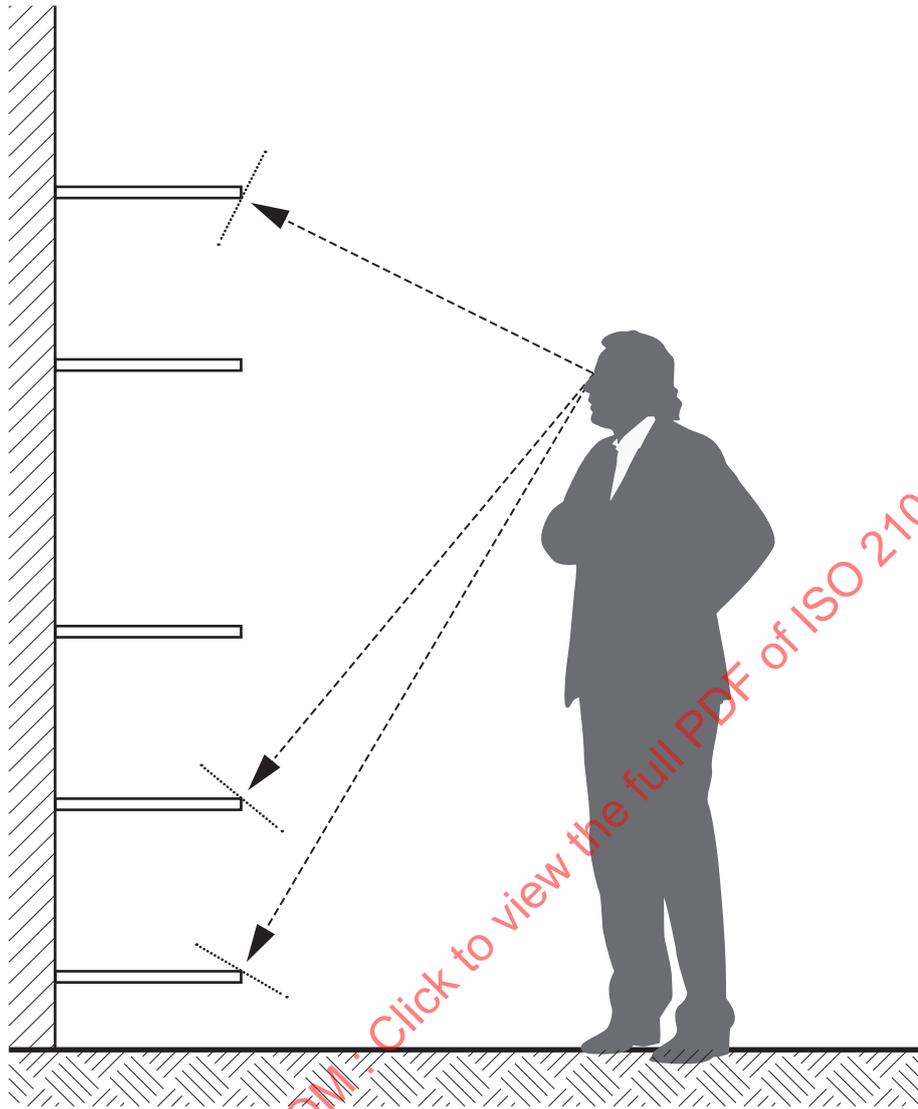


Figure 1 — Angled labels on low- and high-level shelves are easier for consumers to read

11 Provision and display in advertising

In advertising displaying a selling price, to achieve the best unit price display when elements of [Clause 8](#) cannot be used, a combination of the other elements should be used and enhanced.

12 Establishing a new in-store or online unit pricing system

Users of this document should establish a unit pricing system for their in-store or online business. For an example, see [Annex D](#).

13 Consumer education

It is recommended to provide ongoing communication and periodic consumer education programmes about unit pricing. This helps to remind experienced consumers in cases where unit price usage has begun to drop off over time, and to educate inexperienced consumers entering the market about how to use unit prices (such as young people or migrants from countries where the concept of unit price is not widespread). This is particularly significant given that research shows that without periodic education usage by consumers decreases over time.

Consumer education can be achieved by

- using appropriate communication channels (e.g. mass media and in-store education materials for consumers), and
- providing examples, where possible, to illustrate unit price provision and use.

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Annex A (informative)

Examples of the potential benefits of unit price provision

A.1 Potential benefits for consumers

For consumers, the possible main benefits of unit pricing are

- facilitating informed decision making through more transparent pricing,
- facilitating household budget savings or purchase of a greater number of items,
- promoting quicker and easier purchase decisions,
- informing consumers of the range of unit prices within product categories and between retailers, and
- facilitating easy price comparisons

A.2 Potential benefits for retailers

For retailers, especially early adopters of unit pricing, the possible main benefits are

- improving their image of providing good value for money,
- improving consumer trust through more transparent pricing,
- enhancing consumer satisfaction, since consumers prefer shopping in stores with clear unit price information, and
- improving display consistency of on-shelf pricing for same brand products with different sizes.

A.3 Potential benefits for governments

For governments, the possible main benefits are

- promoting of fair competition,
- enhancement of government responsibility to promote consumer interests,
- reduction of regulatory burden (e.g. removal of standardized container size regulation), and
- facilitation of the containment of the cost of living.

Annex B (informative)

Guidance for depicting unit price information on labels

B.1 General

Unit price information can be displayed on shelf and package labels in a variety of ways that make use of the elements outlined in [Clause 8](#), so as to be easily noticed, read and understood by consumers.

B.2 Constant measure package examples

The two examples in [Figure B.1](#) illustrate shelf labels with good unit price information layout for a constant measure packaged product. The example on the left illustrates a good layout where the unit price information is located closest to the selling price and where an optional coloured background has been used to increase noticeability. The example on the right illustrates a good layout where the unit price has not been located closest to the selling price, but, as a trade-off, a white space and a border/box have been used to increase noticeability.



Figure B.1 — Constant measure package examples

B.3 Variable measure package example

The example in [Figure B.2](#) illustrates a price label with a good unit price information layout for a variable measure packaged product. Unit price information is located close to the selling price in clear bold font. A considerable amount of white space has been used to help increase noticeability.



Figure B.2 — Variable measure package example

B.4 Checklist

The following checklist has been developed to assist with designing labels to incorporate effective unit price information display (see [Clause 8](#)). Research supporting the use of these elements is listed in the Bibliography.

- Location:** The unit price should be below or otherwise adjacent to the selling price. Where possible, the unit price should be the information that is the closest to the selling price.
- Font type:** The font type used for the unit price should be clear and easy to notice and read (e.g. bold). Avoid italics, underlining, thin or compressed font types, and capital letters.
- Font size:** The unit price should be displayed in the largest practical font size possible. It should be more prominent than information intended for the retailer only (e.g. barcode, product position, supplier number, product code).
- Colour and contrast:** It is recommended that the unit price be displayed using black text on a white background for maximum contrast. An optional coloured background can be used to enhance noticeability of unit price information, but should not reduce legibility. The use of coloured text for the unit price information should be avoided.
- White space:** White space should be used around the unit price to enhance noticeability.
- Borders and boxes:** Borders and boxes should be used on labels with limited white space to help consumers notice the unit price.
- Expression of "unit price":** When provided, the words "unit price" should be placed adjacent to the unit price.
- Format:** The unit price should be shown in a consistent way based on each country's grammatical order and normal practice (e.g. \$1,03 per 100 g, \$1,03/100 g or 100 g = \$1,03).
- Symbols and abbreviations:** Symbols and abbreviations used to indicate denomination and units of measure should be easily understood by consumers (i.e. standard abbreviations, see [Annex C](#)). A word (e.g. "per") or a symbol (e.g. "/") should be used to indicate the unit of measure.
- Monetary denomination:** The unit price should be expressed in the most appropriate denomination for the product category (e.g. \$1,03 per kg not 103 cents per kg). Chosen denominations should be used consistently.
- Non-ambiguous:** The unit price should be displayed to ensure clarity of meaning and to avoid confusion with any other displayed information.

B.5 Other considerations

- Obscuring:** Any obscuring of the unit price as part of display should be avoided (e.g. by product(s) or holders around shelf labels and price signs).
- Consistency of display:** The same presentation principles should be used consistently to display unit price information on all labels within a store, across stores and across store formats.

B.6 Illustration of elements

For clarity, the annotated illustrations in [Figure B.3](#) depict elements of good unit price labelling.

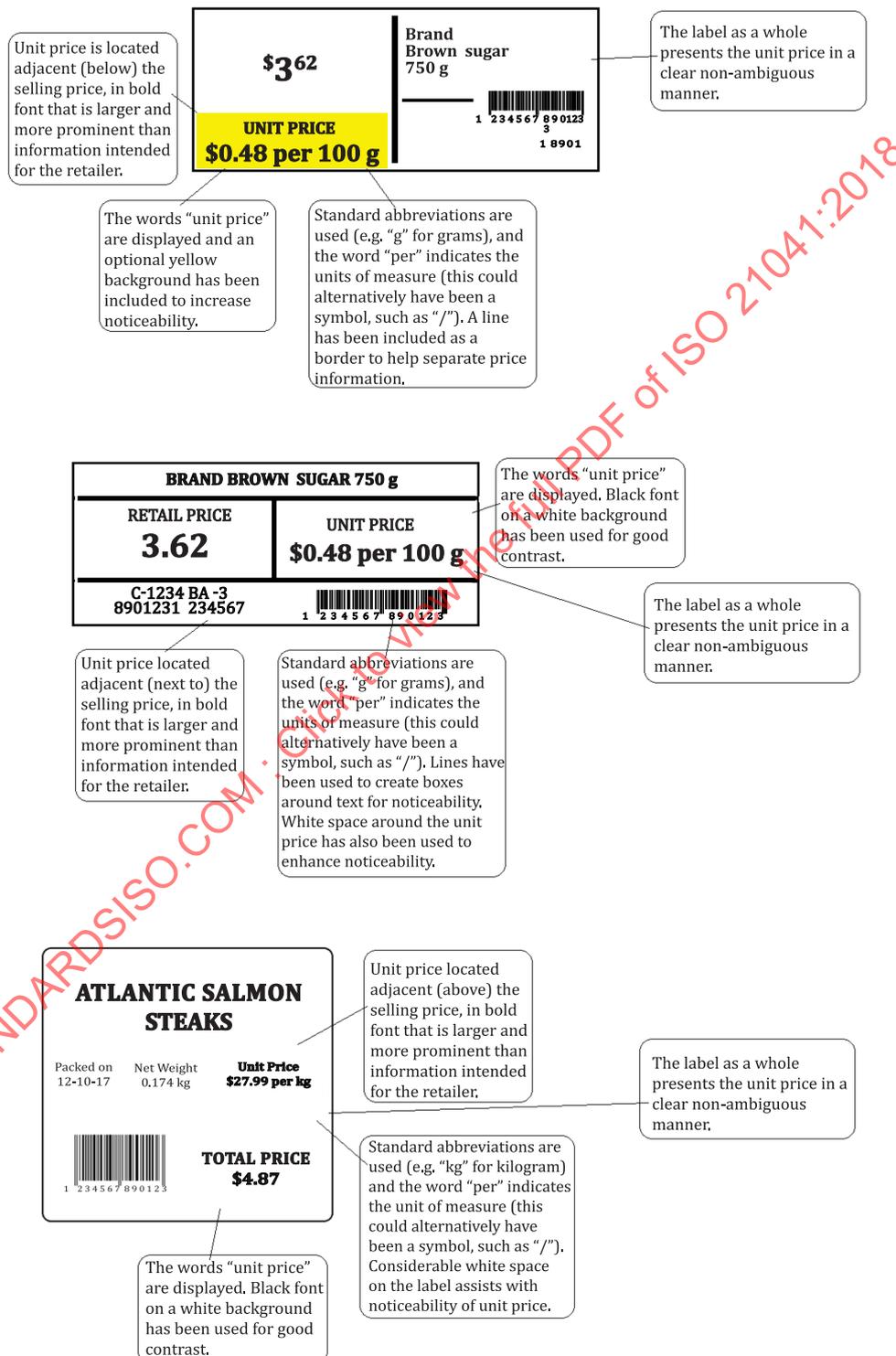


Figure B.3 — Elements of good unit price labelling

Annex C (informative)

International system of units of measure and abbreviations

C.1 Metric symbols

Units	Symbols/abbreviations
— Millimetre	mm
— Centimetre	cm
— Meter	m
— Gram	g
— Kilogram	kg
— Millilitre	ml
— Litre	l
— Square centimetre	cm ²
— Square decimetre	dm ²
— Square metre	m ²

C.2 Customary symbols and abbreviations of units

Units	Symbols/abbreviations
— Count	ct
— Each	ea
— Feet or foot	ft
— Fluid	fl
— Gallon	gal
— Inch	in
— Ounce	oz
— Piece	pc
— Pint	pt
— Pound	lb