
Phasing Out Trans Fat: The Cambridge Story

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Trans Fat

What is it and why is it used?

- Trans Fat is made by adding hydrogen to unsaturated Fatty Acids
- It extends the shelf life of food products
- Partial hydrogenation gives a gooey, delicious, mouth-pleasing fat

Why is trans fat bad for you?

- It raises “bad” cholesterol, lowers “good” cholesterol, and causes heart disease
- Elimination of trans fat would lower
 - Deaths due to heart disease by 70,000-225,000 per year
 - The risk of type 2 Diabetes by 40%

Communities going trans fat free

- New York City
- 11 other cities, including Philadelphia and Chicago, considering bans
- 11 states considering, including Massachusetts, are bans or regulations
- Several states considering bans on school menus

National Restaurant Chains switching to trans fat free

- Wendy's
- Cheesecake factory
- Au Bon Pain
- Legal Sea foods
- California Pizza Kitchen
- KFC
- McDonald's



The Beginning of the Conversation

- City Council Order (10/16/06) –
“directs the Public Health Department to investigate a program to decrease trans fats in food served in Cambridge restaurants”
- Cambridge is typically an early adopter in matters of public health

The Public Health Department Response

- Stated that trans fat should be banned after a period of education and voluntary compliance

- Allocated staff time to the issue of trans fat reduction

Engaging the restaurant community

- Approach local business association
- Increase education & awareness
- Conduct informal survey - done by local college intern (engage academic community)

Preliminary Findings

- Many restaurants were already trans fat free
 - Ethnic
 - Organic
- Restaurants were willing partners
- Restaurateurs were leaders
 - Brochure developed

What do restaurant owners need?

- Leaders from among their peers
- Education
- Info and access to suppliers
- Joint purchasing
- Incentives and promotion

Next Steps

- Public Hearing
- Task Force - Public Health, Economic Development, Inspectional Services Department, License Commission, restaurant owners and local business associations
- Timeline – 4 monthly meetings
- Staffed by Public Health Department

Task Force Activities

- Decide on who/what to target
- Engage restaurants
- Conduct self assessment for consumers and restaurants
- Set goals for voluntary compliance
- Submit recommendations to City Council

Task Force Recommendations

- Phased-in ban
- Consumer and restaurant education
- Resources
- Incentives
- Regulation & enforcement strategies
- Timeline
- Evaluation

Lessons Learned – Necessary Requirements

- Political will and wish to be “in front of the curve”
- Public health department willing to support a ban and allocate staff support
- Promotional and enforcement capacity
- Engagement of restaurant association

■ Special Thanks...

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- Cambridge City Council