

Trans Fats

Talking Points ...

- Trans fat happens when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil. The process is called **hydrogenation** and increases the shelf life and flavor stability of foods. Trans fats can be found in vegetable shortenings, various margarines, snack foods and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. A small amount of trans fat is found naturally.
- Over the past several years there has been a push by lawmakers and officials at the federal, state, county, and city levels to **eliminate trans fats** from food served by restaurants and other food service establishments.
- On January 1, 2006, the Food and Drug Administration began requiring all food manufacturers to list trans fat content on the nutrition facts labels on all packaged foods.
- Last year, California enacted a statewide trans fat ban in restaurants that takes effect in 2010. Cities and counties that have banned restaurants from using trans fats in food preparation and cooking include: New York City; Philadelphia; Boston; Brookline, MA; Stamford, CT; Cambridge, MA; Albany County NY; Westchester County NY; Suffolk County NY; Montgomery County MD; King County WA; and Nassau County NY.
- During the 2009 legislative session, several states and cities have introduced legislation to ban or require the labeling of trans fat in food prepared by food service establishments, including New York; Texas; Connecticut; Indiana; Maine; Massachusetts; Mississippi; Tennessee; Maryland; and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.
- The National Association of Concessionaires (NAC) notes that the top three selling theater concession items (soft drinks, popcorn with natural butter and candy) **do not contain trans fat**. Theaters that use coconut oil to cook popcorn are also avoiding trans fat. NAC estimates that 85% of its members have moved or are in the process of moving away from trans fats and the other 15 percent are preparing to do so.
- The National Restaurant Association (NRA) says there should be a voluntary, incentive-based phased-in approach to replacing trans fat with healthier oils. Instead of instituting bans, public health officials in some cities and counties—such as Los Angeles and Multnomah County, Oregon—have partnered with the restaurant industry to voluntarily phase out trans fat and educate consumers about healthier diets.
- Laws that outright ban trans fats could have unintended consequences. A ban on trans fat could result in food establishments **turning back to oils high in saturated or animal-based fat** because healthier alternatives are in short supply.
- The demand for trans fat alternatives far outstrips the supply in the short term. According to the Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils, there is a demand for 8 billion pounds of partially hydrogenated oil subject to replacement, while there is only a supply of 4.5 billion pounds of low lin soy, high oleic canola, palm and other stable oils. That is a supply deficit of 3.5 billion pounds.