

Connecticut Restaurant Association
February 26, 2007
Public Health Committee
SB 258 - An Act Prohibiting the Use of Trans Fat in Connecticut Food Service Establishments

Good afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. I'm Simon Flynn, president and CEO of the Connecticut Restaurant Association. I am speaking in opposition to Senate Bill 258 – An Act Prohibiting the Use of Trans Fat in Connecticut Food Service Establishments.

Banning trans fats takes a very narrow approach to a much larger health issue. Connecticut should focus on the larger health issue at hand, obesity and heart disease, and work to educate its citizens and business community on the important aspects of a healthy lifestyle.

We need education for our citizens so that they understand the role of specific fats in the diet.

Restaurants are in the business of hospitality. We respond to our customers' varying demands and restaurants responding to the growing awareness of trans fats.

We do not dispute the science that man-made trans fats are unhealthy. We do believe, however, that change should happen at the pace of the marketplace, concurrent with the pace of education.

Nearly 80% of the oil used for cooking and baking in this country comes from soybeans. In its natural state, soybean oil spoils quickly and that is why in 1911 there was a switch to hydrogenating soy oil, that and some taste considerations. We now know that the hydrogenation creates trans fats, which have recently been shown to increase levels of bad cholesterol. Today bioscience has developed a soybean whose oil does not spoil quickly and farmers are gradually switching, however, soybeans are a commodity and are in competition with other profitable crops such as corn, which is increasingly being used for ethanol. The farmer will decide which crop he grows. Major manufacturers and major restaurant chains will also influence the marketplace, both in price and the availability of zero trans fat alternative oil. The bottom line is the supply of oil has been affected.

New York city has banned trans fats. They looked at a couple of situations where there was a successful transition. It first happened in Tiburon, California where it was voluntary. New York also looked at Denmark, where there was success in eliminating trans fats in their food. However, Denmark did so by using palm oil, which is 50% saturated fat, this certainly doesn't bring the health effect we should strive for.

In summary, there are key elements to our opposition.

- I. The emphasis should be on education and voluntary compliance. There are successful examples of that happening right now in Los Angeles with the California Restaurant Association and in Oregon with the Oregon Restaurant Association. The Connecticut Restaurant Association wants to work in the same cooperative way, whether that is as LA is doing by door emblems that declare zero trans fats or the comprehensive education going on in Oregon. We need to begin, but to do so with food service establishment as part of the process.

- II. Trans fats are only part of the problem and restaurants play only a part in the solution to eliminating trans fats. According to the National Restaurant Association's research, the average American consumes 4.2 meals per week that are prepared away from home. That means 76% of all meals are still prepared at home. A comprehensive solution of education and cooperation with the industry will best serve public health.

- III. The marketplace is changing rapidly, accelerating that change may lead to supply disruption that will be acutely borne by the independent restaurants. Soybeans are a commodity affected by market forces. Restaurants rely on the supply chain and receive prepared or partially prepared products such as par fried French fries. The entire marketplace needs to change and this can't happen overnight. The marketplace is changing rapidly; but give it the time it needs to change. Let's review the progress in 2008 and deal with that future reality.

We agree that man-made trans fats are unhealthy and need to be eliminated. Please make that change in cooperation with the industry and with consideration for the larger health issue of a healthy lifestyle.