



CENTER FOR  
Science IN THE  
Public Interest

*The nonprofit publisher of  
Nutrition Action Healthletter*

February 26, 2007

Senator Mary Ann Handley, Co-Chair  
Representative Peggy Sayers, Co-Chair  
Public Health Committee  
Room 3000  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

**In Support of Proposed Bill No. 258 – An Act Prohibiting the Use of Trans Fat in Connecticut Food Service Establishments**

Dear Senator Handley and Representative Sayers:

I am the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a nonprofit health advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. Among other things, CSPI led the effort to win passage of the law requiring nutrition labeling on packaged foods, and we publish the Nutrition Action Health newsletter, the nation's largest-circulation nutrition newsletter.

I applaud Senators McKinney and Roraback for introducing Proposed Bill No. 258, which would ban trans fat in Connecticut restaurants. This legislation would help protect Connecticut citizens from a very significant cause of heart disease. Harvard School of Public Health researchers recently estimated that each year trans fat causes 72,000 to 228,000 heart attacks, including roughly 50,000 fatal ones. **Considering that Connecticut's population is about 1 percent of the U.S. population, these figures translate into about 700 to 2,300 heart attacks and about 500 deaths annually in Connecticut. Those illnesses and deaths are unnecessary, and many could be prevented by the legislation offered today.**

CSPI has long been concerned about trans fat. In 1993 we first called on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to require the trans-fat content of packaged foods to be listed on labels. The FDA finalized its labeling regulation in 2003. We are finally starting to move in the right direction. As you may know, last year the New York City Board of Health passed a trans fat ban for city restaurants, and earlier this month Philadelphia passed a similar law.

Partially hydrogenated oils—think stick margarine and solid shortening—are the source of most of the trans fat in our diet and have had a dramatic recent history. Twenty years ago, the FDA and academic scientists (and CSPI) thought they were safe. But that all changed in 1990, when research began demonstrating that trans fat, on a gram-for-gram basis, is the single most harmful type of fat—even worse than the saturated fat in meat and dairy products—in terms of promoting heart disease. There is now virtual unanimity among scientists that people should consume as little trans fat as possible from partially hydrogenated oils.

While my organization began calling for the labeling of trans fat in 1993, the research conducted over the next dozen years indicated that trans fat was far more harmful than anyone originally suspected

Many food manufacturers, including Kraft, Frito-Lay, and ConAgra, responded to the FDA's labeling requirement by switching to healthier trans-free oils. However, restaurants don't provide labeling, and many restaurants have not switched to healthier oils.

The American Heart Association and the federal government's Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee have recommended that Americans get less than 1 percent of their calories from trans fat, or about 2 grams per day. Many restaurant foods contain far more than that. A large order of McDonald's fries provides 8 grams of trans fat, or about 4 days' worth. At Burger King, a mom could start the day with 8 grams of trans fat in her hash browns while her child consumed 4.5 grams in the French Toast Kid's Meal. And over at Krispy Kreme, most doughnuts contain at least 5 grams of trans fat.

Because the FDA has refused to take national action, CSPI strongly supports city and state legislation that would get artificial trans fat out of all restaurants. The bill you are considering would limit the amount of trans fat in restaurant foods. Many restaurants, large and small, are demonstrating that such limits are practical. Consider:

- Such big chains as Arby's, KFC, and Taco Bell recently joined Wendy's, Ruby Tuesday, Chili's Grill & Bar, Ruth's Chris, and Panera Bread in moving toward healthier oils. Wendy's said that the new oils don't cost any more than the old.
- Small restaurants, too, such as Ina's Kitchen in Chicago, Katz's Delicatessen in New York, Pete's Kitchen in Denver, Country Diner in Akron, Ohio, Faros Family Restaurant in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and many others have largely eliminated trans fat. Some have said that the switch was cost-neutral, while others say the extra expense was minimal. Legal Sea Foods told me that their fish tastes better now that it is fried in liquid oil.
- Marriott International (with 2,300 hotels), Carnival Cruise Lines, Disney Theme Parks, and Universal Studio Theme Parks have announced they will be phasing out all trans fats in the food they serve.
- McDonald's sells foods without trans-free oils in much of Europe, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and certain other countries. It has announced that it is on the way to removing trans fat in the United States, including over 1,000 of its 13,000 U.S. restaurants. It's unclear whether they have switched oils in Connecticut.
- Denmark has essentially banned partially hydrogenated oil by setting a 2 percent limit on the trans fat content of the oils in food. McDonald's, KFC, and Burger King, as well as all Danish companies, have switched to trans-free oils, apparently without any problems or complaints.

In sum, if all those restaurants could switch and protect their customers' health, so could every restaurant in Connecticut. It would be nice if every restaurant switched voluntarily, but they are not. That's why Connecticut—and every other city and state—should fulfill their responsibility to protect the public's health by passing legislation such as the bill you are considering. You could save hundreds of lives at virtually no cost to citizens and the city and only a temporary, modest cost and inconvenience to the restaurants. Connecticut has a unique opportunity to

become the first state to ban trans fat in restaurants. I hope that the Public Health Committee and the Connecticut state legislature will act on this opportunity and approve this legislation promptly.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Jacobson  
Executive Director