



The BAN on TRANS

CANOLA OIL POISED TO INCREASE MARKET SHARE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST TRANS FAT

THE FIGHT AGAINST TRANS FAT HAS

been gaining some muscle lately with a growing number of proposed restrictions around the world and in many facets of the food industry. When New York became the first city in the United States to prohibit *trans* fats in restaurants and bakeries, the confrontation suddenly became a heavyweight bout.

New York's health department went so far as to suggest canola oil as an alternative to *trans* fat-laden partially hydrogenated oils. Indications are that more jurisdictions, restaurant chains and food manufacturers will follow suit, which should drive up the demand for *trans* fat-free canola oil.

Denmark led the way in 2003, restricting the amount of *trans* fat permitted in any food to no more than two percent of the total calories from fat.

Other cities in the United States, including Chicago and Boston, and countries such as Australia, are working on similar legislation. So far, the only enforced changes in the U.S. are in New York. The more than 20,000 eateries in the city have six months to find alternative margarines, shortenings and

frying oils, and 18 months to replace *trans* fat in all other foods.

There has been some backlash from restaurateurs who claim 18 months is not enough time to find comparable alternatives. However, Dr. Sonia Angell,

hydrogenated oil in terms of taste and viability.

Barb Isman, President of the Canola Council of Canada, says the industry estimates this particular type of canola oil can decrease saturated and *trans* fat

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director of the Cardiovascular Disease Prevention and Control Program for New York's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, stresses the importance of implementing these changes. “We believe it’s in our jurisdiction to protect New Yorkers in the restaurant environment, particularly when diners have no way to know what food has *trans* fat in it,” she says.

Similar changes have been made voluntarily by many restaurant chains, including Taco Bell, KFC, Carvers, Olive Garden and Red Lobster. Many of their operations now rely on high oleic canola oil which performs like partially

in foods by approximately 85 percent. “Canola oil is the natural choice to replace partially hydrogenated oils in deep frying,” she says. “Canola oil suppliers can provide solutions for food service operators looking for functionality and good nutrition.” While all canola oil is *trans* fat-free, it has the added bonus of being the lowest in saturated fat of all commercially available fats and oils.

In Canada, current legislation requires all manufactured foods to list the amount of *trans* fat per serving on the package so it is easy for consumers to find. Before this mandatory labelling came into effect,

Canadians had one of the highest *trans* fat intakes in the world.

Further action against the use of *trans* fat has been the subject of recent study by a special group of industry experts called the *Trans* Fat Task Force. According to Tyler Bjornson, the Canola Council's Vice-president of Corporate Affairs, the Task Force is pursuing a government directive "to eliminate or drastically reduce the level of *trans* fat consumption in the Canadian diet".

Its members come from government, academia, nongovernmental organizations and all areas of the industry, particularly food processors. The Canola Council of Canada has representation on the expert committee on fats, oils and lipids.

After a year of study, the Task Force recommended the federal government restrict the amount of *trans* fats to two percent of the total fats in products such as soft margarines and shortenings, and five percent in other foods. This recommendation is still before the government, but Bjornson says it is not as high on the public health agenda as issues such as patient wait times. However, he believes it will resurface with future government initiatives.

Despite the Task Force's call for government involvement, the Canola Council does not believe it is the ideal solution. "Our strong preference is that government doesn't regulate," Bjornson says. "If it wants to provide direction, there are better ways from an industry perspective to do it – such as educational efforts using the food guide, and existing regulations such as nutritional labelling that clearly identify amounts of both *trans* and saturated fats."

Bjornson believes the government should assess the value of current practices before implementing further restrictions, because the market has reacted to public demand and the prospect of regulation. "Over the past year and a half, a number of very large players in the food industry have made great strides toward changing their products to meet these demands. I think the government has to take into account just how far the industry has come already."

Bjornson believes improving the process for obtaining a qualified health claim would also help promote canola oil as a healthy alternative. In the fall of 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug



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Administration announced that canola oil could bear a qualified health claim. This claim is based on canola oil's ability to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease because of its unsaturated fat content. Implementing a similar claim process in Canada would provide useful tools for consumers to make healthy food choices.

While the demand for canola oil is likely to increase with the prospect of new guidelines or regulations, the industry is well prepared for the shift. According to Cargill's Willie Loh, Director of Sales and Marketing, "Cargill has a very wide range of zero *trans* options, probably the widest in the industry, particularly for the foodservice industry. If the market goes that way

because of regulatory, political or social changes, we are there to serve the market. We have been investing in and developing *trans*-free options for more than a decade." He adds, "We have already been doing very significant business in New York City, because the city has always had a very strong health focus."

David Dzisiak, Global Oils Leader of Dow Agrosciences says that one of the most important aspects of the changes in New York is the message it sends to consumers across North America. "We have a large customer set that will need a solution right away. High stability canola oil is the best solution today we can also make it available in large quantities today," he says. ❀

What is *trans* fat?

Trans fats are found naturally in small amounts in certain foods (e.g., dairy products, beef and lamb). Also, small amounts of *trans* fats are formed during the refining of liquid vegetable oils. *Trans* fats are created when manufacturers use a process called «partial hydrogenation». This process turns liquid oil into a semi-solid form, such as shortening or margarine.

Food products made with fats or oils with a high proportion of saturated or *trans* fatty acids have a longer shelf life than products made with oils that contain a higher proportion of other fatty acids. Saturated and

trans fatty acids also play a role in producing the textures and flavours that make many bakery products and snacks so tempting.

Trans fats do two things to increase the risk of developing heart disease:

- raise blood levels of so-called bad cholesterol (LDL-cholesterol). LDL-cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease.
- lower blood levels of so-called good cholesterol (HDL-cholesterol). HDL-cholesterol protects against heart disease.

excerpt from Health Canada's website:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/gras-trans-fats/index_e.html