

HLSG 5 – Artificial trans fats advice to small businesses

Aim

This paper informs HLSG members that advice to small businesses on artificial trans fats has now been completed. The advice, together with supporting information for enforcement officers will be placed on the DH website and disseminated to businesses and Local Authorities in due course.

Summary & Development of the Guidance

The HLSG agreed in March that advice should be developed for small and medium sized businesses to support the Food Network pledge to remove artificial trans fats from foods. This decision in part recognised concerns that small businesses may not be engaged with the Responsibility Deal, and yet may be a significant source of products containing artificial trans fats in the market place.

The draft guidance was developed following consultation with major oils and fats manufacturers and trade associations as well as the Federation of Small Businesses and The Federation of Wholesale Distributors and their members.

The draft guidance was piloted in August/September 2011 with more than 40 businesses across seven local authorities. Feedback from this exercise highlighted the difficulties in raising awareness and understanding of artificial trans fats among small business owners, and the very limited action which they were prepared to take to ensure their products were free from them. The final guidance was therefore substantially simplified, and is limited to advising businesses not to purchase any ingredients/products which declare hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) in the ingredients list. [We recognise that a small percentage of products may contain fully hydrogenated vegetable oil, and therefore no appreciable artificial trans fats, but it has proven necessary to use HVO as a proxy to ensure the final advice is practical for businesses]

By following this advice small retail businesses will be going further than the pledge (larger retailers actions are limited to their own brand products), but we hope that the simplicity of approach will make it more likely that small businesses will adopt the guidance, and simultaneously address concerns about imported products.

Dissemination

The advice will be placed on the Department's website and cascaded to lead food enforcement officers, and regional enforcement groups in due course. Officials are also exploring with Responsibility Deal partners alternative avenues to reach small businesses including through trade associations, major suppliers and the trade press.

See attached annex for the final advice and additional information for officers.