

## **HLSG 5(b) - Tips to remove artificial trans fats for small and medium sized businesses – Additional information for local authorities**

This information is for local authorities who want to help small and medium sized food businesses ensure their food does not contain added artificial trans fats. It should be read alongside the associated tips for businesses, which provide advice on sourcing foods and frying oils that do not contain added artificial trans fats. The voluntary advice is appropriate for small and medium sized independent retailers, manufacturers and caterers.

### **Background**

The Government's overall strategy for public health is set out in the White Paper *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, which makes reference to the Public Health Responsibility Deal. This is part of the Government's strategy to improve public health through working in partnership with industry, the voluntary sector, NGOs and local government.

To support the development of the Responsibility Deal, five networks were set up for food, alcohol, physical activity, health at work and behaviour change. The Food Network has developed voluntary pledges aimed at making it easier for people to choose a healthier diet, which businesses are being asked to sign-up to. One of the pledges requires food businesses to remove artificial trans fats from their products by the end of 2011.

The aim of this work is to encourage as many small and medium sized businesses to follow the advice as possible, but they are not necessarily expected to sign up to the Responsibility Deal pledge to remove artificial trans fats. However, they are welcome to do so if they wish and if they meet the general requirements of the Responsibility Deal. We have included details of how businesses can learn more about what this involves.

Further information on the Responsibility Deal can be found at:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Publichealthresponsibilitydeal/index.htm>

### **The artificial trans fats pledge**

*We have already removed, or will remove, artificial trans fats from our products by the end of 2011*

Full details of the pledge can be viewed on page 11 of the following document:

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_125082.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_125082.pdf)

In summary, the pledge requires that:

- Fats and oils are free from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil and contain no more than 2% total trans fats.
- Food service providers procure products and adapt their practices to remove artificial trans fats.

As small businesses may not have the necessary information about their products to assess whether they meet the pledge the advice to businesses shows what they can do to ensure this is the case.

## **Health risks of eating too much trans fats**

Eating too much trans fats can be bad for your health as they raise the type of cholesterol in the blood that increases the risk of heart disease. Current levels of trans fats in the UK diet are within recommended levels, and the Responsibility Deal pledge will help to ensure that levels remain low.

Consumers can also have confidence that the products sold by businesses that follow this advice and/or sign the pledge are free from added artificial trans fats in the future.

## **Technical information**

A number of issues have been raised in the development of this advice, which you may find it useful to be aware of.

Removal of trans fats is a complex topic to address as there is often a lack of understanding of the sources of trans fats (both artificial and natural) and of the legislation around labelling and claims relating to trans fats.

## **The difference between partially and fully hydrogenated vegetable oil**

Although **partially hydrogenated oil** can contain artificial trans fats, **fully hydrogenated oil** does not contain artificial trans fats. However, an ingredients list does not have to differentiate between the two, so it is usually not possible to tell whether a product contains partially or fully hydrogenated oil just by reading the label. Businesses would need to contact the manufacturer or supplier directly to try to find this out. Testing of this advice revealed that it is not feasible for small businesses to do this. That is why we have chosen to use hydrogenated vegetable oil as a proxy for trans fats and in the advice for businesses, if the label states hydrogenated oil, we recommend businesses choose an alternative product.

In fact, it is more likely to be partially hydrogenated vegetable oil as this is more commonly used than fully hydrogenated vegetable oil, since full hydrogenation is a more expensive manufacturing process.

## **Why does the pledge have a 2% cut-off for levels of trans fats in oil?**

The main source of artificial trans fats is from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. Much smaller amounts may also be formed during the normal oil refining process. This is unavoidable and so a cut-off figure of 2% trans fats content has been chosen to allow for the unavoidable production of small amounts of artificial trans fats in oils. This level was chosen as it has been used internationally and is considered practical by oils and fats manufacturers.

## **Can businesses make trans fats claims?**

It is not currently permitted under EU legislation for businesses to make claims such as 'trans fat free' or 'contains less than 2% trans fats' on their packaging.

For further information please contact

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