

Oil Change

Publicity plus pending laws push trans-fat-free concessions operations

BY NATASHA EMMONS

Some concessionaires read the writing on the wall when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration started requiring that all processed food manufacturers reveal the use of unhealthy trans fatty acids on their product labels as of Jan. 1, 2006. Other concessionaires were startled to attention in December when New York City passed a ban on all trans fats in restaurant food by

1960s and 1970s due to their longer shelf life and easier-to-handle liquid state, and quickly spread throughout all kinds of baked goods and snack foods.

Delaware North Companies has already completed the process of removing trans fats in its Parks and Resorts group and is moving forward in Sportservice, according to Richard Dobransky, vice president of Food and Beverage.

“We are exploring using products made primarily with monounsaturated fat and polyunsaturated fat and are working with our suppliers as they develop alternatives,” he said. Saturated animal fats can be just as harmful as trans fats, he said. “There has been a slight increase in pricing as the market adapts, however we anticipate that to be temporary as R&D costs will be reduced as solutions are discovered and implemented.”

Sportservice has an aggressive timeline: “Reduction over the next 12 months and elimination within a year after that. Again, we are also actively working with our suppliers which may accelerate

27 percent of American adults feel strongly about limiting their trans fats intake in meals purchased away from home, up from an average of 21 percent in 2005.

— Aramark Nutritional DiningStyles

July 2008. And many of the rest are hoping to just go with the flow toward healthier alternatives with the rest of the industry in due time.

Chemists are hard at work inventing comparable trans-fat-free shortening and cooking oil alternatives.

The FDA released research in 2003 that found consumption of hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils (trans fats) increases a person's level of bad cholesterol, thereby increasing the risk of coronary artery disease.

Saturated fats also have bad effects on cholesterol levels. However, polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats (such as olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil, and corn oil) have good effects.

Trans fats became popular in the

that timeline,” Dobransky said.

It's more the health of customers than the threat of legislation that is motivating Sportservice, Dobransky said. “It is making all of us more accountable to our customers as well as helping each of us explore better tasting and healthier menu options.”

According to the 2006 Aramark Nutritional DiningStyles Research, 27 percent of American adults feel strongly about limiting their trans fats intake in meals purchased away from home, up from an average of 21 percent in 2005.

Aramark is aiming for a complete conversion to trans-fat-free fryer oil by the end of the first quarter 2007, according to David Freireich of Corporate Communications.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



OIL CHANGE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

(This doesn't apply to entire recipes, just the fryer oil.)

A trans-fat-free fryer oil is defined by the Food and Drug Administration as having 0.5 grams of trans fat or less per serving. "Among the zero grams trans fat fryer oils we will be using is Mazola ZT, but we are also identifying and testing other products that reduce or eliminate trans fats," Freireich said.

Aramark is using press releases to broadcast the changes.

According to Paul Daly, vice president of Purchasing and Merchandising for Centerplate, the cost for using alternative oils that have not been hydrogenated has dropped from an increase of 80 percent over hydrogenated three years ago to about 10 percent now. And he expects that

customer is going to start asking for it," Daly said. "I'd rather be in a position where we were doing it already and pleased to do it, instead of being in the position of being asked over and over why we didn't do it."

Whether or not Centerplate decides to advertise the change to walk-up customers depends on whether the supplier that is eventually chosen has a name that is recognizable to the public, "if we can market it," Daly said. The company is looking at six to eight different suppliers at press time.

Boston Culinary Group (BCG) hopes to make significant progress on this issue in 2007, according to BCG's Joe Armstrong III. "The results have been positive. The trans-fat-free frying oil is comparable to the hydrogenated oil while producing a lighter flavor, along with the

declined to comment for this story.

Ovations Food Service is depending on the industry as a whole to move toward trans-fat-free alternatives, according to Todd Wickner, chief operating officer. "We're an end-user, we're not a manufacturer," Wickner said.

But legislation creeping in on the state level is keeping the operation on its toes. "We'll be moving with that," Wickner said. "Some states are moving quicker than others and that's the way we'll approach it. We'll continue to develop new products to replace the trans fats and we'll move in that direction."

Flavor is the biggest issue, Wickner said. "We have to make sure that if things are not good for the customer we move in the direction...to find alternatives that still meet the needs of the customer," Wickner said. "When you go to a stadium, you're there to have fun and enjoy foods related to the stadium environment. Boy, if you ever took that away from them, oh my gosh I can't imagine."

The biggest concern of the National Association of Concessionaires (NAC) is the enacted and impending legislation banning trans fats from foodservice menus, according to the association's president, Larry Etter, Malco Theatres.

Cities including Chicago and Boston, and states including California and Colorado are considering legislation. "From a national standpoint, the federal government is not going to get involved," Etter said.

NAC has supported the National Restaurant Association in lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C., but has not taken an official stance, Etter said. "We've been real covert. We don't want to bring any attention to ourselves."

NAC is acting as a source of support to concessionaires with concerns, providing information on the association's Web site, www.naconline.org. Etter also suggested visiting the FDA Web site, because it is unbiased.

In the long run, suppliers should not charge more for non-hydrogenated oils, since the process is actually eliminating a step (the hydrogenation), Etter reasoned. "What we're hearing is most manufacturers already have alternative products and they are the same price." **Vt**

"It's impossible to go 100 percent trans-fat free; some items have it in them because of nature." — Paul Daly, Centerplate

percentage to drop to zero as suppliers compete to offer the best, cheapest options.

"The last couple of years, prior to this big, big push by the media, we were looking at the possibilities," said John Dingas, corporate vice president of Culinary Operations for Centerplate. "At the time we began looking at it — 24 to 36 months ago — it was an extremely expensive proposition. But now as the market has changed and the supply is there, it's effectively a net zero."

Centerplate has been looking at corn, coconut, palm and sunflower oils as replacements. "You name the seed, we've tried it," Daly said. The company hopes to have made the switch to non-hydrogenated shortenings by the end of this year.

"It's impossible to go 100 percent trans-fat free; some items have it in them because of nature," Daly said.

A small amount of trans fat is found naturally, primarily in some animal-based foods.

Questions about trans fats haven't been coming up at concessions stands yet, but Centerplate wanted to be prepared. "There may be yield difference fry-wise, but from a standpoint of doing the right thing and being a good corporate citizen, we know the

obvious health benefits."

BCG is finding the alternatives costing up to 30 percent more than hydrogenated oils, however, Armstrong said.

"Customer satisfaction is at the top of the list," Armstrong said. "Healthy dining options are important to our guests, and Boston Culinary Group works to exceed their expectations. Our Culinary Team and Purchasing Department keep up with industry trends and are always looking for innovative ways to enhance our services."

And feedback from customers has been good, he said. "In some locations we are advertising the changes using table tents, counter cards and buttons on staff uniforms. The costs [for advertising changes] are minimal."

BCG is not promising a 100 percent trans-fat-free menu, either, however. "Trans fats are still used in the production process by many food suppliers making it difficult to eliminate their use altogether," he said.

BCG has not yet decided whether any specific menu items should be replaced because of this initiative, Armstrong said.

Levy Restaurants, another player in fine dining at live entertainment venues,

Interviewed for this story: **Paul Daly**, **John Dingas** (via Gael Doar), (203) 975-5941; **Todd Wickner**, (813) 948-6900; **Joe Armstrong III**, (617) 499-2700; **Richard Dobransky**, (716) 858-5000; **Larry Etter** (via Susan Cross, NAC), (312) 236-3858; **Chris Bigelow**, (816) 483-5553; **FDA press office**, (301) 827-6242