



FDA to Restaurants: You're Drafted!

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration wants restaurants to join the anti-obesity army. A new FDA report recommends that the away-from-home food industry, which it contends has a significant impact on obesity, become more active in helping consumers manage caloric intake. The report was created by the Keystone Forum, a non-profit organization that specializes in bringing together diverse participants to develop consensus on pressing public policy issues.

The *Keystone Forum on Away-from-Home Foods: Opportunities for Preventing Weight Gain and Obesity*, provides recommendations from experts in industry, government, civic sector organizations and academia, for restaurants to modify menus and provide guidance to consumers.

Americans spend approximately 46% of their food budget on food prepared away from home and take in 32% of their calories from such foods, according to FDA. Meanwhile, some 64% of U.S. adults are overweight, including 30% who are obese.

Among the recommendations made to operators:

1. Market lower-calorie menu items; concomitantly, reduce marketing of higher-calorie foods.
2. Use calorie-sparing cooking techniques that are widely accepted by consumers.
3. Develop and promote portion-size, plate composition and menu-pairing options that help consumers in their efforts to manage their energy intake. Stop promoting large portions.
4. Develop, make available and promote beverage options that help consumers reduce caloric intake.
5. Collaborate with industry and academia on marketing and education.
6. Provide consumers with calorie information in a standard format that is easily accessible and easy to use. (Oakbrook, IL, based McDonald's is putting such information on its wrappers, for example.)
7. Provide "lifestyle" education to help consumers choose more healthful foods when dining out.

Operators who choose to go this route should brace for additional costs. A large quick-service or casual-dining restaurant would have to spend between \$11,500 and \$46,000 for a lab test of its menu to determine calories, fat content and other nutrition content levels, according to the report.

Consumer, Medical Groups Escalate War on Foodservice

Even as FDA prompts restaurateurs to cut back on calories served, consumer activists are seeking to force operators to provide more healthful foods in general.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Washington, DC, for example, has filed suit against KFC, Louisville, KY, seeking to prohibit KFC from using partially hydrogenated oil for cooking chicken. The chemically altered, trans-fat-laden oil kills roughly 50,000 Americans per year, CSPI claims.

Taking a proactive approach, another major fast-food chain, Wendy's International, Dublin, Ohio, has announced it will remove partially hydrogenated oils from its deep-fryers. In addition, Wendy's is changing the name of its "Biggie" items, because "Biggie" is no longer better in light of public perceptions and the obesity war. (The change is in name only, however. Wendy's will continue to offer a super-size portion of fries that is actually bigger than what it used to call its Biggie. The Biggie size has now become the medium-size fry portion.) McDonald's actually stopped super-sizing French fries and drinks two years ago.

At the same time, the American Medical Association (AMA) has called for a 50% sodium reduction in restaurant meals and processed foods, to reduce hypertension and cardiovascular disease.