

# Task Force on Trans Fat

## Consultation questionnaire

May 20, 2005

Health Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada are co-chairing a task force aimed at finding ways to effectively eliminate or reduce processed (industrial) *trans* fats in the Canadian food supply to the lowest levels possible. To that end, the Task Force will be delivering, by November 2005, final recommendations to the Minister of Health regarding an appropriate regulatory framework and the introduction of healthy alternatives to processed *trans* fats.

Given the need to limit the size of the Task Force, a consultative approach will ensure that interested parties and key experts who are not on the Task Force will have the opportunity to provide input and advice on specific questions. This consultation will be held in Ottawa on **June 13, 2005**.

*Comments and feedback are welcome*

This questionnaire aims to obtain feedback from individuals and stakeholder groups about how Canada can effectively eliminate processed *trans* fats from foods sold in Canada. Stakeholders are asked to respond to some or all of the questions. All input will be considered by the Task Force as the final recommendations to the Minister are being developed.

Should you wish to make a presentation to the Task Force at the June 13, 2005 consultations, we would ask that you send us a 1-2 page paper addressing some or all of the questions below by **June 3, 2005**. If you wish to provide the Task Force with additional documentation, please provide a 1-2 page summary. Invitations to make a presentation to the Task Force will be issued shortly after June 3rd.

Stakeholders are also invited to attend the June 13 consultations as observers. Given that space is limited, we would ask that you reserve a spot ahead of time if you wish to attend (please see the last page of this questionnaire for instructions). We look forward to hearing from you.

## Background

*Parliamentary Motion*

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, a *trans* fat related motion was passed in the House of Commons. This motion called for the establishment of a Task Force that would look to "...effectively eliminate or reduce processed *trans* fats in Canadian foods to the lowest level possible". Among other things, the Task Force will consult with relevant stakeholders to ensure that any solution does not cause undue hardship for consumers or industry and that it leads to an overall health benefit for Canadians. The Task Force will be required to present its recommendations to the federal Minister of Health by

November of 2005. A variety of stakeholders will be involved in this consultation, including the food industry, voluntary associations, academia, scientific experts and others.

### *Why Reduce Trans Fats?*

*Trans* fat or *trans* fatty acids are formed during the partial hydrogenation of unsaturated fats. Vegetable oils which contain high levels of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids are hydrogenated to increase their stability and to raise their melting point so they are solid or semi-solid at room temperature. Partially hydrogenated oils are used to make baking and frying shortenings and margarines and other spreads, all of which are solid at room temperature. Products that contain partially hydrogenated oils (e.g., crackers, cookies, pastries, snack foods, deep-fried foods) are by far the biggest source of *trans* fat in the Canadian diet.

It was only in the 1990's that it was confirmed that *trans* fatty acids raised LDL-cholesterol (also known as “bad” cholesterol) and lowered HDL-cholesterol (so-called “good” cholesterol). On the other hand, dietary saturated fatty acids, an established risk factor for coronary heart disease, raise both LDL-cholesterol and HDL-cholesterol and it has therefore been concluded that dietary *trans* fatty acids pose a significantly greater risk to health than saturated fatty acids.

It has been estimated that Canadians consume on average about 8 grams of *trans* fat per day. This is high compared to Europe and somewhat higher than in the United States. The high intake is due to the widespread use of canola and soybean oils which are partially hydrogenated for use in shortenings, commercial deep-fat frying and some margarines.

## **Questions**

### *A. Questions concerning alternatives to partially hydrogenated oils*

1. What alternatives are currently offered by suppliers to manufacturers who wish to replace partially hydrogenated oils and fats?
2. What are the fatty acid profiles of these alternatives, i.e. proportion of individual fatty acids in the total fat?
3. Can these alternative products be grown, processed and produced in Canada?
4. Is there a sufficient supply of these alternatives? If not, what can be done to improve the availability of these alternatives? How long do you expect it to be before a sufficient supply could be made available?

5. How does the functionality of these alternatives compare to partially hydrogenated oils with respect to the aspects below? (When providing data please indicate for which type of food product(s) the data relates to).

- Lubricity
- Creaming
- Body
- Lamination
- Moisture barrier
- Heat transfer (frying)
- Oxidative stability (storage and frying stability)

*B. Questions concerning the health impact of the alternatives*

1. Taking into account the limitations and practical considerations of the food production process, what would be the best possible nutritional and health characteristics of alternatives to partially hydrogenated oils that could be achieved?

*C. Questions concerning the transition to healthier alternatives*

1. Given your understanding of the food manufacturing industry, can you identify the factors which can facilitate the transition to healthier alternatives (technological or otherwise)?

2. What can be done to support the transfer of knowledge and expertise to small and medium sized firms to facilitate the elimination or reduction of *trans* fats?

3. Based on your experience, do you have any information about the challenges associated with the elimination or reduction of processed *trans* fats? For example, costs, time and other resources required to make relevant changes within a product line.

4. Even when alternatives to partially hydrogenated oils exist for sometime, manufacturers may choose not to switch to healthier alternatives (e.g. as observed in the case of soft margarines). What are the reasons some manufacturers may not be making the change?

5. Are you familiar with any data about the consumer acceptability of food products in which partially hydrogenated oils or shortenings have been replaced with other alternatives? For example, costs, shelf-life, taste, texture, etc. If so, please provide details?

#### *D. Questions concerning possible regulatory options*

1. The Task Force is charged with providing recommendations for an appropriate regulatory framework to achieve the effective elimination of processed *trans* fat. There may be a range of options available - from regulations that would encourage the voluntary elimination of processed *trans* fat to the imposition of an upper limit that would apply to all foods without exception. In your view, what elements should be incorporated to this regulatory framework?
2. It was suggested that the Task Force should consider imposing a limit on the *trans* fat content of fats and oils, as has been done in Denmark where the limit is set at 2% of total fat. Is this a reasonable goal for Canada now or later? Please explain.

#### *E. Other Questions*

1. In the short-term, what actions are being taken or could be taken to enable consumers to reduce their *trans* fat intake?
2. Are there any other issues or perspectives regarding the elimination of processed *trans* fats that you would like to share with the Task Force?

### Providing Feedback

Health Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada encourage all interested organizations and individuals to provide feedback and respond to the questions presented in this questionnaire. Responses and suggestions should be submitted no later than June 3, 2005, to the contact person indicated below. If you wish to observe the consultation session, please RSVP by June 6, 2005 to:

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