



## Reading the Labels

**T**here are lots of reasons why your customers are reading labels. Women of my generation are feeding hungry teenagers and coming to grips with the ubiquitous presence of trans fats. Other moms have been reading labels since day one, if a deadly peanut allergy is in the family or if members are intolerant of certain foods.

We're also realizing that we can't keep the weight off as easily as we once could. It seems like half of North America is trying out the Atkins or South Beach diets, and carbs have become public enemy number one. My mother's generation is grappling with the all too common twin evils of high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and some are coping with caring for elderly parents to boot.

On one of my morning runs, I asked my buddy if she reads labels, and when and why she started. Her mother's heart condition and the need for a specialized diet were the primary motivators. She needed to know how much fat and sodium were in particular items and learned to make different choices.

And when you come down to it, choice really is the operative word here. Wouldn't you rather have your brand be consumers' top choice when those few seconds of indecision in the grocery aisles determines what actually goes into their carts?

The good press that early adopters have garnered in the trans fats wars will stand them in good stead. Pepperidge Farm's Goldfish crackers will definitely be top of mind when moms pick up snacks for lunch boxes and for after-school munchies. Canada's own Voortman Cookies was



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first out of the gate in launching trans fat free cookies, and Frito-Lay managed to get some good press with sunflower oil cooked potato chips and other snacks. Granted, I've never seen these foods listed as part of Canada's Food Guide, but we have to be realistic and realize that snacks, cookies and crackers will always be part of our lifestyle.

Even the politicians are hopping onto the trans fat bandwagon. Winnipeg MP Pat Martin introduced a private member's bill last month in Parliament. The proposed law would limit trans fats to no more than two per cent of total fats in processed foods.

Food manufacturers in general are not waiting for this issue to fade to black.

Spots sold out almost immediately at the Guelph Food Technology Centre's (GFTC) half-day breakfast seminar on trans fats. About 60 applicants were left on a waiting list. The GFTC is planning a full day seminar for late spring or early summer. It will cover such topics as the functional chemistry and science of fat replacements, the health message behind the science, labelling issues and formulation variables, such as fat replacement ingredients, packaging and shelf life issues. Consumers want and need this information to make responsible choices in the continuing

effort to manage their eating habits and ultimately their health. We all know that a cherry cheese danish will never be a carrot. But we can reformulate products and label them as having lower or no levels of trans fats and our hearts will thank us for it.

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