

Staying Ahead Of The Regulatory Game

Lindsey Jahn, Associate Editor, Food Manufacturing

As federal agencies keep an eye on consumer health, food and beverage manufacturers are working independently to make their products healthier, often



well ahead of regulatory mandates.

The FDA recently announced that it will require the food industry to phase out the use of trans fats, saying that they are a threat to public health. According to FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, removing trans fats from the food supply could prevent 20,000 heart attacks and 7,000 deaths per year.

While the move certainly will impact some food manufacturers, the proposed ban likely will have minimal impact in the industry — mainly because many companies already removed trans fats from their formulations years ago. The amount of trans fats found in Americans' diets has declined drastically in the past decade, largely due to the industry's efforts to remove the substance from food products well ahead of an official ban.

In fact, Michael Taylor, FDA's commissioner for foods, stated that the industry's vigorous efforts to remove trans fats actually impacted the agency's ability to make an all-out ban on the ingredient feasible. "We want to [remove trans fats from the market] in a way that doesn't disrupt markets," Taylor said. "Industry has demonstrated that it is by and large feasible to do."

The trans fat ban is just the latest example of the food industry's willingness to be proactive when it comes to public health. Industry players know that not only is the development of healthy products beneficial to consumers, but it also positively impacts their bottom lines, as well as their ability to stay one step ahead of ever-changing regulatory requirements.

Earlier in 2013, the FDA announced that it would at last set a standard definition for "gluten-free." The agency had been working on standardizing the label for six years,

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during which time manufacturers were left to decide the meaning of “gluten-free.”

Many gluten-free manufacturers stepped up in the absence of regulation by ensuring that their products met requirements to be certified gluten-free by various third-party organizations, such as the NSF International Gluten-Free Certification Program. Once the FDA announced its definition of gluten-free to be products containing less than 20 parts per million of gluten, many of these certification groups were quick to announce that products bearing their certification already would be within the FDA requirements.

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