

## CONSUMER TRENDS

# Bakeries report progress on removing trans fat, additives

FOR MANY IN-STORE bakeries, the FDA's proposed ban on partially hydrogenated oils — a major source of artificial trans fat — seemed like a no-brainer given what their customers are asking for and the progress they've already made in reformulating products.

"Most all the products in our bakery have been 'clean' for a long time, so it's not really been a real hot button for us. We kind of got ahead of the curve about 15 years ago," said Scott Fox, bakery director, Dorothy Lane Market. The retailer's artisan bread and store-made pastries, both introduced more than a decade ago, never used trans fat, for example.

**“But I do get a lot of positive feedback from customers appreciating that concern and time has been taken to clean up ingredients.”**

—KELI LESSING  
Harmons

When Harmons hired in-store dietitians in 2012, the retailer asked them to go through every item in the bakery to recommend ingredients that should be replaced or phased out. Hydrogenated oils were on the list.

Harmons began with its signature items, like scratch cookies.

"And then from there we just slowly worked through the list, trying to find alternatives or working with the producers of those materials on seeing if they had alternatives or if they could change their items," said

Fresh Bakery Sales Director Keli Lessing.

Similarly, the United Family has worked with vendors to find trans fat free products.

"For the past couple years, we have purchased items without trans fats (when available) because we feel it is best for our guests," said Tammy Kampsula, business director of bakery.

United has also put "trans fat free" signs (pictured at right) on certain bakery items.

## Mixed messages

While such signage is increasing, it's still not the norm, according to data from Nielsen Perishables Group. For the 52 weeks ending in June, Nielsen saw a 7% increase in dollar sales year-over-year for products that include a "no trans fat" label. However, such products account for just 2% of bakery department sales.

"We know that there's a lot more products that are made without trans fat. But they're not necessarily touting it in the description and on the front of package and the labeling," said in-store bakery specialist Jonna Parker.

Harmons hasn't made a big push to say its bakery doesn't use trans fats because some products are technically "trans fat free per serving" per current FDA guidelines, meaning they still contain trans fat but at amounts less than 0.5 grams per serving.

"So it's kind of difficult to know how to give a clear message saying, we feel like we're doing the right thing but we still have all this, this could be bad for you," said Lessing.

The retailer has asked vendors for alternative products and ingredients to completely eliminate trans fat. In some cases, Harmons has moved to scratch baking if alternatives weren't available.

"Like we switched our cupcake program. Cupcakes were



trans fat free per serving. We're now making all of our cupcakes in store," said Lessing.

In the past, it was hard to find workable alternative ingredients. When Dorothy Lane tried to remove trans fat from its cakes about eight years ago when palm oil shortenings first became available, the quality of the cakes wasn't the same, Fox said. Customers weren't happy, and cake sales suffered.

As a result, the retailer went back to using products made with trans fat.

"You're talking about birthday cakes, number one they have to look good, they have to taste good. It's not too much about being all natural or being clean," said Fox.

For many consumers, flavor trumps health claims in the bakery.

"So while they want it and

they're going to feel better if you say no trans fat, immediately though you run the risk of them going, ooh, I don't like that you changed the flavor," said Parker.

## Eliminating additives

At the same time, retailers agreed customers are more aware of what goes into their food and are increasingly wary of long ingredient lists. Aside from trans fat, additives like preservatives and artificial flavors and colors are a concern.

"I think there's some folks who are extremely concerned and will change the way that they behave and where they shop and how they spend their money if they see an additive that they don't like. But then there's also a halo effect. And then there's some people who might not change their behavior all the time but are conscious of it," said Parker.

Customers at United are among those looking more carefully at ingredient labels, and the retailer has taken note.

"We have a list of 83 restricted ingredients and if they are not in the product, we consider that item as all natural. We call out 'all natural' on the signs and product labels. We have been using this list for approximately two years and the restricted ingredients are also approved by our corporate di-

etitioners," said Kampsula.

The dietitians at Harmons put certain additives on their list of items to remove from the bakery. Customers have noticed the changes.

"So overall I really haven't been getting a lot of feedback from customers about negative ingredients that we're carrying, because I think we've cleaned up a lot of those out of our bakeries. But I do get a lot of positive feedback from customers appreciating that concern and time has been taken to clean up ingredients," said Lessing.

Dorothy Lane directs customers concerned about additives to its "natural" products, but not all items are additive-free.

"My opinion is, flavor first. It needs to taste great. So is everything we have clean? Not at this point. A lot, an awful lot of it is. But there's just a few things that you will still find some of those items in some of our products," said Fox.

While additive-free bakery items may be a priority for certain customers, Parker thinks it's unlikely to lead to an industry-wide revolution.

"You see changes in label claims, and you hear about certain retailers touting that they've made different changes, but it isn't that the whole industry has changed yet. Nor frankly might it ever, just because that's still only a segment of the population," said Parker.

—Liz Webber



Retailers need to balance CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS of flavor with health concerns in the bakery.

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