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Most “Volunteers” in Restaurant Industry’s Nutrition Information Program Stepped Back Two Paces

OTTAWA (January 22, 2008) — Food industry watchdog, the Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), released the results of its nutrition disclosure survey of 136 outlets of 27 chain-restaurants registered as complying with the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice Association’s “Nutrition Information” program. All those companies committed to provide nutrition information “through in-store brochures...at each unit location [and] on participating company websites.”

Instead, according to the survey results, 18 of the 27 restaurant chains failed to live up to even the feeble standards of the program. Those 18 chains provide brochures or posters in only a minority of the outlets surveyed or none at all. Nearly half (13) of the chains provided no, or virtually no, nutrition information at any of the outlets surveyed. One-third (9 chains) didn’t even provide nutrition information on their corporate websites. Not a single restaurant surveyed provides the number of calories or the amounts of key nutrients like saturated fat and sodium right on the menu, where consumers could readily see and use it before choosing foods.

Those companies’ allegedly effective programs were spun, in 2006, to convince MPs to kill a bill in Parliament that would have required nutrition information to be disclosed on menus of chains with more than \$10 million in national food sales. Canadians spend more than \$40 billion annually on restaurant food, much of which is high in calories, saturated fat, and sodium, the key culprits in high rates of heart disease, diabetes, and certain forms of cancer. Objective nutrition labelling is already mandatory on prepackaged food labels.

Bill Jeffery National Coordinator of the Centre for Science in the Public Interest made the following comment on the results of the study:

“Restaurants known for efficient service and huge portions are remarkably clumsy and stingy when it comes to doling out choice-altering, life-saving nutrition information. Many chains bury nutrition information on corporate websites, in brochures tucked behind counters, on the bottoms of tray liners, or in posters mounted where as few people as possible will see them. Canadians deserve--and improving the public’s health requires--more. Even the most forthcoming of the lot, McDonald’s, hands out a nutrition-sheet, face-down and after the food is ordered, with nearly 2,000 nutrition numbers—20 per menu item—in print scarcely 1 millimetre tall.

In the fall of 2006, the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice Association and its member companies supersized enough baloney to persuade a number of MPs to ignore the health experts and drop their support for the bill. The Conservative Party voted unanimously against bill C-283 and votes from other parties weren’t enough to tip the balance. Notably,

the Bill was opposed by four MPs with personal or family interests in large fast-food chains. (The bill also proposed to require Nutrition Facts on prepackaged fresh meat (now exempt) and was opposed by seven MP-cattle-ranchers.)

In December 2007, Health Canada initiated consultations on a proposal to mandate further labelling requirements for prepackaged groceries to prevent consumer deception, but makes not a peep about restaurants, which provide an increasingly large percentage of Canadians' meals and snacks.

CSPI calls on provincial and municipal governments to pass menu-labelling laws until the restaurant industry's hold over the federal government loosens."

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For more information, call: Bill Jeffery, National Coordinator of CSPI at 613-244-7337.

Background Information on Bill C-283

Link to Bill C-283: http://www2.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Bills/391/Private/C-283/C-283_1/C-283_1.PDF

Voting Record on Bill C-283 (at pp. 4926-7):

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/House/391/Debates/079/HAN079-E.PDF>

PowerPoint Slides of Bill Jeffery's speech to the Liberal Caucus Meeting of Legislative Assistants, one week preceding the vote in November 2006:

in English http://www.cspinet.org/canada/pdf/c283_eng.pdf and

en français http://www.cspinet.org/canada/pdf/c283_fr.pdf

2-page Briefing note on Bill C-283:

in English http://www.cspinet.org/canada/pdf/C283_200609.pdf and

en français: http://www.cspinet.org/canada/pdf/C283_200609_Fr.pdf

Canadian restaurant and Foodservice Association's Nutrition Information Program:

<http://www.crfa.ca/research/resources/foodandfitnessfacts/voluntaryguidelines.asp>

List of chains committing to the "minimum standards" of the program:

<http://www.crfa.ca/research/resources/foodandfitnessfacts/participatingchains.asp>

CRFA's Media Comment following vote on Bill C-283:

http://www.crfa.ca/news/2006/menu_labelling_bill_defeated.asp

Recent Developments in the US: Since Bill C-283 failed, municipal governments in New York City and Seattle (Washington) have passed local laws requiring menu labelling. In fact, today (January 22, 2008), the New York City Board of Health unanimously voted to require, by March 31st, calorie labelling on menus and menu boards of chain restaurants with more than 15 outlets nationally. An earlier attempt at the rule was temporarily derailed by restaurant industry litigation. A California bill passed by the state's assembly and senate was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

CSPI Survey* on Adherence to the Canadian Restaurant and Food Service Association's Voluntary Nutrition Information Program

	Chains publicly committing to the voluntary program	Is Nutrition Info on Menus as per Bill C-283?	Are Nutrition Brochures or Wall Poster Available at All Restaurants Surveyed?	Is Nutrition Info on Corporate Website (Jan 2008)?
1	A & W	No	5/8 (50%)	Yes (in 113 pages of text, one page per menu item)
2	Burger King	No	7/8 (88%)	Yes (in 1 mm tall print)
3	Casey's Bar and Grill	No	0/3 (No)	No
4	Country Style Food Services	No	0/3 (No)	Yes (in 9-page brochure)
5	Dairy Queen	No	2/7 (29%)	No ("coming soon")
6	East Side Mario's	No	0/3 (No)	Yes
7	Fionn McCool's	No	0/3 (No)	No
8	Harvey's	No	7/8 (88%)	Yes
9	Ikea	No	0/4 (No)	No
10	Jack Astor's Bar and Grill	No	1/3 (33%; sole complying restaurant took 15 mins to photocopy 3-year-old fact sheets on request.)	No
11	Kelsey's	No	0/4 (No)	Yes (in 1 mm tall print)
12	KFC	No	6/8 (75%)	Yes
13	Little Caesar's	No	0/4 (No)	Yes
14	McDonald's	No	8/8 (100%; (Nutrition info available on bottom of tray liners, wall posters, and/or packaging and generally only visible after purchasing food.)	Yes
15	Mr. Greek	No	0/3 (No)	No ("being updated")
16	Pizza Hut	No	3/8 (37.5%)	Yes (in print < 1 mm tall)
17	Pizza Nova	No	2/3 (67%)	Yes
18	Pizza Pizza	No	2/4 (50%)	Yes (in 15 pages)
19	Shoeless Joe's	No	0/3 (No)	Yes
20	St. Hubert	No	0/5 (No)	No (only amounts of carbohydrates and fats for some menu items)
21	Swiss Chalet	No	4/6 (67%)	Yes (in 1 mm tall print)
22	Taco Bell	No	3/7 (43%)	Yes
23	The Pickle Barrel	No	0/2 (No)	Yes (44-page brochure)
24	Tim Hortons	No	7/8 (87.5%)	Yes (in print < 1 mm tall)
25	Van Houtte Cafe	No	0/2 (No)	No
26	Wendy's	No	3/8 (37.5%)	Yes (8 page brochure)
27**	White Spot	No	0/3 (No)	No (withdrew from program)
TOTAL		0/27 put nutrition info on menu or board.	60 of 136 provided brochures or wall poster. 13 of the 27 chains had no brochures at all of the outlets surveyed.	9/27 provided no info on website. 10/27 provided info using a format or print size that discourages use.

*Results were compiled by visiting 136 restaurants in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, September-November 2007.

** White Spot withdrew from the CRFA's Nutrition Information program after Bill C-283 was defeated.

The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is an independent health advocacy organization with offices in Washington and Ottawa. CSPI's advocacy efforts are supported by more than 120,000 subscribers to the Canadian edition of its Nutrition Action Healthletter. CSPI does not accept industry or government funding and Nutrition Action does not carry advertisements.