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March 25th, 2010

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, PC, MP
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

Re: Regulation of Trans Fat is Urgently Required

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), and the OPHA Food Security Workgroup. OPHA represents over 3,500 public health practitioners through individual memberships and 11 constituent societies. OPHA's mission is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health, and its Food Security Workgroup advocates for access to a healthy and safe food supply.

Trans fat that is produced industrially is the most unhealthy type of dietary fat, with proven links to increasing the risk for chronic diseases, especially heart disease. Canadians had been found to have one of the highest intakes of trans fat in the world, which led to the formation of the federal Trans Fat Task Force (TFTF). The TFTF released its report on recommendations in June 2006.

In June 2007, former health minister Tony Clement gave the food industry two years to voluntarily reduce trans fat in the food supply to levels that had been recommended by the TFTF. If satisfactory progress wasn't shown from monitoring the levels of trans fat in various food categories, then regulations were to be imposed.

The voluntary approach has not been sufficiently and universally effective in reducing levels of trans fat in our food supply. Health Canada's final set of monitoring results released on December 22, 2009 provided further evidence of high levels of trans fat in many foods.

The evidence is in. A plan had been established. The time to act is now.

It is important that regulations be developed quickly, and be applied across the food supply. Growing children frequently consume baked goods and pastries that tend to have high trans fat levels. People on low incomes may not be able to afford products bearing “trans-fat free” claims, which tend to be more expensive. Broad-reaching regulations will improve food quality within and across food categories, resulting in health benefits to the entire population.

Regulations need to be supported by sufficient resources. To ensure effectiveness, adequate provisions must be allocated to monitor and enforce compliance with regulations. Equally important is addressing the TFTF’s recommendation to support the ability of the food industry to reformulate products using healthier trans fat-free alternatives.

From a public health perspective, a regulatory approach designed to virtually eliminate industrially-produced trans fat in our food supply will best protect the health of all Canadians. I urge you and your government to act decisively and promptly on this serious health issue.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Kim Ouellette, Co-Chair of the OPHA Food Security Workgroup, at 905-688-8248 ext. 7322 or kim.ouellette@niagararegion.ca.

Sincerely,



Liz Haugh
President