

Truth in Labeling: Your Vending Machine Is about to Guide Your Diet

Vanessa Merta | December 11, 2014

Does menu labeling cause consumers to make healthier choices? The U.S. Food and Drug Administration thinks so.

A few weeks ago, the FDA finalized two regulations that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act mandated in 2010. The [announcement](#) issued on November 25, 2014 requires calorie information be listed on menus and menu boards in chain restaurants, similar retail food establishments with 20 or more locations and vending machines.

Consumers should begin to notice the difference as soon as next year since restaurants and vending machines need to comply with the law before December 2015.



Vanessa Merta

FDA Commissioner, Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg, said that this regulation is an “important step for public health that will help consumers make informed choices for themselves and their families.”

While this federal regulation was announced just a few weeks ago, many restaurants have used self-imposed calorie information guidance on their own for years. The first company to voluntarily post calorie counts in all of their locations was [Panera Bread](#) in 2010. [Starbucks](#) and other chains have been labeling calories since April 2008, but only in New York City stores, as required by a NYC law.

While the FDA’s intentions are to improve public health, individuals and groups such as the Center for Consumer Freedoms have raised some concerns. Do calorie counts on menus actually cause consumers to eat healthier? Will increased information on nutrition hurt revenue for the business? Researchers in many different fields have been looking for the answers.

Stanford Graduate School of Business [studied](#) New York City Starbucks and the effects that calorie labeling had on consumer behaviors as well as the impact on revenue.

The study found that customers whose average purchase was over 250 calories decreased by 26 percent. Stanford researchers concluded that posting calorie counts on menu boards does, in fact, affect consumer behavior.

Stanford also concluded that Starbucks revenues were not affected by the calorie-posting requirement. However, for Starbucks stores located within 50 meters of a competitor, calorie-postings led to an *increase* in Starbucks revenue.

The [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), one of the world's largest philanthropies devoted to public health, conducted a four-year [research review](#) on the effects that menu labeling has on the average consumer. Over the course of this long-term review, they found that labeling wasn't only something that the average consumer wanted, but that it reduces the amount of calories per transaction, and in some cases causes restaurants to offer healthier, lower-calorie options.

Opponents to menu labeling such as U.S. House of Representatives Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-Mo.), Sam Graves (R-Mo.), Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) and Jean Schmidt (R-Ohio), signed a [letter](#) proposing pamphlets with calorie counts be available next to menus, rather than posted. Both studies said that the consumer rarely seeks out nutrition information outside the point of purchase. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [study](#) claimed that customers see menu labels at the point of purchase and those labels increase their awareness of nutritional information, effectively educating the consumer better than a website or pamphlet could.

Do you think this mandate will change your eating habits or do you think that online nutritional information is sufficient now? Let us know how you feel about this new rule in the comments section!

To read this post on RWHC blog, [click here](#).