

Tyler Morning Telegraph

Government dietary rules unnecessary, inconsistent

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It's Girl Scout cookie season, and while this should be a joyous occasion in the hearts and lives of all Americans, we are reminded of a somber anniversary. In 2007, the Girl Scouts took the trans fats out of their cookies. Thin Mints have never been the same.

We should have known. The pattern was clear.

First, the dieticians came for our butter. Eat margarine, they said. We complied. We totally, completely did believe it's not butter, despite what the marketers said.

Then they came for our eggs. They left us with nothing but egg white omelets.

Then they came for our salt, rendering all our joys bland and tasteless.

Now, they've come for our trans fat.

"The Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday finalized a plan to essentially rid the country's food supply of artery-clogging trans fats, a move the agency estimates could reduce coronary heart disease and prevent thousands of heart attack deaths a year," the Washington Post reported last year. "Companies will have three years to remove partially hydrogenated oils from their products."

This is a big reversal from just a few years ago, when trans fat was viewed as a healthy alternative.

"Trans fats first gained popularity in the United States in the 1940s, and over generations became a key ingredient in everything from pizzas to microwave popcorn to pancake mix," the Post explains. "Food manufacturers embraced trans fats, and no wonder. They provided desirable taste and texture, extended the shelf life of baked and fried foods and were cheaper than animal-based fats such as lard or butter."

It was the Center for Science in the Public Interest that started the campaign against trans fat. But the Center isn't really about the science part; it's all about the public part - as in, "let's make decisions for the public because they really can't be trusted to make decisions for themselves."

That's how the Cato Institute's Walter Olson sees the group.

"The center's longtime shtick is to complain that businesses like McDonald's, rather than our own choices, are to blame for rising obesity," he wrote in 2010.

The Center conducted a campaign back then to shame McDonald's into reducing its offerings and advertising. A California woman, with the Center's backing, tried to sue McDonald's because her daughter pestered her for Happy Meals, and pouted when she was told no. The lawsuit was tossed.

But back to trans fat - eventually, lots of actual scientists began to agree with the Center that trans fat is unhealthy. The federal government enacted labeling rules, requiring food makers to warn consumers about trans fat in their products. And American consumption of trans fat began to drop, as it was replaced by less onerous alternatives.

But how long will it be before the federal government reverses this decision? After all, it was wrong about eggs. It was wrong about butter. It was wrong about cholesterol. It was even wrong about salt.

We love Girl Scout cookies. Is it wrong to admit to loving them more, when they were tastier?