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Agricultural Outlook Forum
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Presented: March 1-2, 2007

FOOD ICONS

Richard A. Williams, Ph.D.
Labeling and Health Claims, Future of Food Marketing

Food Icons

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Consumer Interest in Icons

73% of all U.S. grocery shoppers would be very or somewhat interested in seeing these (FMI)

Focus groups indicate consumer interest in icons in restaurants



NLEA - Successes and Opportunities/Challenges

Successes

- End to the “Tower of Babel”
- Still widely used and diets improved but,

Challenges/Opportunities

Use of food labels is declining (Health and Diet Survey)

Over 50% of foods have some type of claim (mostly nutrient content) and...



Consumers Use Heuristics That May be Misleading

- **Front of the Package Claims (e.g., nutrient)**
- **Back of the Package - One, or at most two, nutrients:**
 - Number of grams to signal high or low
 - Compare grams to other foods on shelf



Use of Food Labels*

Reason	Percentage (Often or sometimes)
To see how high or low the food is in things like calories, salt, vitamins or fat	86%
To compare different food items with each other	76%
To help you in meal planning	57%
To plan diets	?



* Health and Diet Survey



Can Icons Help?

Research question –

Can icons/symbols help consumers, in addition to information now on the label, to construct healthy total daily diets?



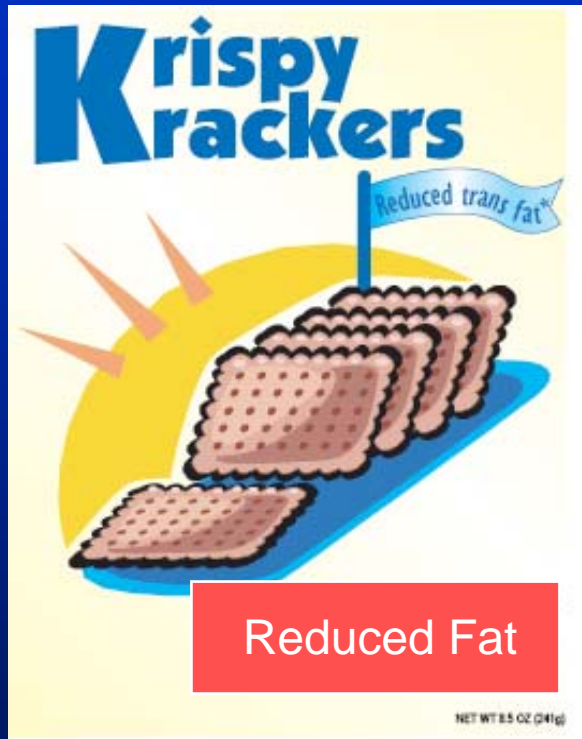
Different Consumer Needs?

Some Consumers:

- **Plan, track and purchase foods to achieve a diet while others.....**
- **Choose foods and meals and diet “happens”**
 - Do not plan anything
 - Pay attention to some nutrients only to compare products
 - Use claims as signals
 - Want to eat healthy, but don't want to do a lot of work to achieve it.



Approaches to Overcome Poor Heuristics



Back Panel Food Label Education

3 Limit these Nutrients

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%

• 5% or less
is Low

• 20% or more
is High

4 Get Enough of these Nutrients

Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

Front Panel

Disqualifying Levels for Claims – Useful for those consumers using claims as heuristics.

Total fat, saturated fat, trans fatty acids, sodium, cholesterol



New Era of Food Icons

- **Manufacturers**
- **Trade Groups**
- **Third Parties**
- **Supermarkets**
- **Restaurants**
- **Governments (foreign)**



Icons by Manufacturers



General Mills
“Goodness corner”



Kraft “Sensible Solutions”

Pepsico
“Smart Choice”



Icons by Trade Group



The Whole Grain
Council Stamp



National Dairy Council
Stamp



Icons by Third Parties



AHA “Heart Check”



Icons by Supermarkets- Hannaford Foods



Good Nutritional Value



Better Nutritional Value



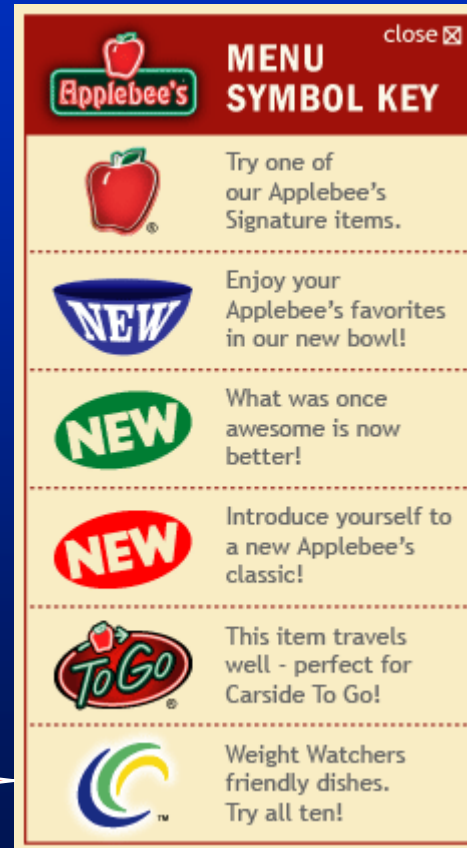
Best Nutritional Value

Icons by Restaurants



Low Fat “Olive” at
Olive Garden

Weight
Watchers at
Applebees



Icons in Other Countries

Canada “Health Check”



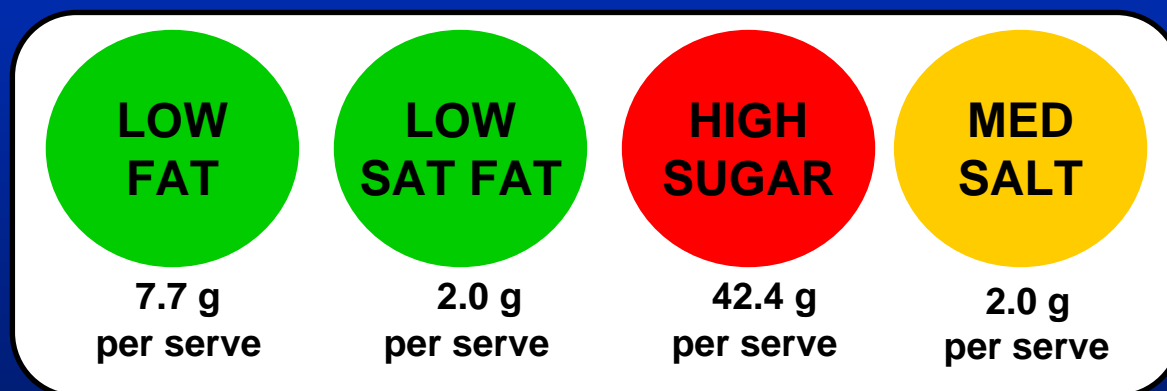
Australian/New Zealand “Pick the Tick”



Sweden “Keyhole”



Nutrient Icons in the UK



Benefits of Label Information

- Cost of obesity, heart disease, diabetes could exceed \$120 billion per year.
- Benefits of NLEA estimated to be between \$4 and \$26 billion
- *Trans Fatty Acids* labeling benefits between \$1 and \$2 billion per year



Potential Costs of Multiple Symbols

- **Consumer Confusion**
 - Multiple symbols
 - Different definitions
- **Industry costs**
 - Multiple labels for different markets
 - Different formulation for different markets

