

# Short Order

MENU P13 - IF YOU'RE IN ... P14 - HOT MARKET P14 - BITES P14 - TECHNOLOGY P16 - THE NUMBERS P16

MENU

## Labeling Battle Continues

As menu-labeling requirements gain momentum, many refuse to swallow rules that would make quick-serves post-calorie counts on menus. BY LYNNE MILLER

Despite industry resistance, legislation mandating menu labeling at restaurants continues to gain momentum. New York City, San Francisco, and King County in Washington state have already passed measures, and industry insiders say the trend shows no signs of slowing.

Advocates believe putting calorie and other nutrition information on menus will help consumers order healthier food. Yet industry groups think the requirements place an unfair burden on franchisees and question whether they'll even have an impact on national obesity rates.

"If you want to address obesity, it's got to start in the home and the school," says Chuck Hunt, a spokesman for the New York State Restaurant Association, which is fighting the New York City policy.

On the other hand, Subway is one of a few chains

that have already changed their New York menu-boards to comply with the rule. Adding calorie totals to the menus wasn't difficult, says Les Winograd, a spokesman for Subway. Furthermore, posting the data was a natural extension of the nutritional information the company has been providing for years, he says.

"We're giving customers information and letting them make the choices," Winograd says. "We're hearing some consumers are happy the information is up and some couldn't care less."

The Center for Science in the Public Interest likens menu data to the Nutrition Facts labels that appear on packaged food sold in grocery stores. The group believes the data will help diners choose healthier dishes.

Yet for all the good intentions, posting nutrition facts on food packages has had no impact on whit-

ening the nation's waistline, Hunt says.

Restaurants would prefer instead to post the data on store posters, Web sites, or kiosks, rather than changing menus, he says. Some chains change menus frequently, so updating the information would be complicated and expensive. According to Hunt, one operator with just more than 15 restaurants in New York City estimates it would cost from \$100,000 to \$150,000 to make the initial adjustments.

Despite the burden on restaurants, menu labeling isn't going to leave the table any time soon, and the industry should brace itself for more legislation, says Dallas attorney David T. Denney, who represents restaurants and bars. The issue could get complicated if town, city, and county lawmakers propose a hodgepodge of rules with different requirements.

"It's just a matter of time," Denney says. "If we're going to have menu labeling, I'd like to see it implemented at the state level." □

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