Statement of
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Press Conference on Partially Hydrogenated Oils and Trans Fat
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One of the most interesting—and sometimes frustrating—things about nutrition is that new research not only expands our understanding of the impact of food on health, but overturns conventional views, leaving consumers confused. Today we are discussing one of the biggest reversals over the past few decades: partially hydrogenated vegetable oil and trans fat.

Hydrogenation is a way of turning liquid vegetable oil into a semi-solid fat. Partially hydrogenated oil has long been used to make shortening, margarines, and processed foods. That ingredient has always been considered to be "Generally Recognized As Safe" by the Food and Drug Administration and is now used in thousands of packaged and restaurant foods.

Hydrogenation artificially creates high levels of fats that are present naturally at low levels in meat and dairy foods. Those fats have an unusual structure that gives them their chemical name, "trans" fat. The factory-made oil provides about 80 percent of the trans fat that we ingest. Notwithstanding some scientists' suspicions, for decades there was little evidence that trans fat was harmful. In the 1970s and 1980s, the FDA asked two expert committees to review the scientific evidence, and both gave trans fat a clean bill of health. However, around 1990, human research began showing that trans fat might promote heart disease.

By 1993 the evidence that trans fat was harmful was becoming crystal clear. That's when the Center for Science in the Public Interest called on the FDA to include trans fat with saturated fat, a long-recognized promoter of heart disease, on food labels. By 1999, the FDA officially concluded that trans fat caused heart disease and should be included in Nutrition Facts labels. In 2003 the FDA ordered that all food labels must list trans fat by January 1, 2006.

Spurred primarily by the impending labeling requirement, several major companies—including Kraft, Pepperidge Farm, Ruby Tuesday, Frito-Lay, and Unilever—have been working to replace partially hydrogenated oil in many of their foods. The progress we're seeing is gratifying, but there's no reason to think that all companies will follow suit. That's particularly the case with restaurants, which are not required to list ingredients or nutrition information on menus or packaging. In fact, because portion sizes at restaurants are so huge, restaurant French fries, fried chicken, fried fish, and pastries tend to contain far larger amounts of trans fat than packaged foods. Hence, today CSPI is beginning a campaign, called **Trans-free America**, to finish off the job that labeling has started. Today is the beginning of the end for partially hydrogenated oil.

CSPI has set up a new web site—**www.TransFreeAmerica.com**—to inform consumers about trans fat and the products that contain trans fat. The web site also enables people to send a message to some of the world's biggest providers of trans fat, starting with McDonald's.

Also today, we are formally petitioning the Food and Drug Administration to rescind its acceptance of partially hydrogenated vegetable oil as a Generally Recognized As Safe ingredient and get it out of the food supply. The FDA simply cannot consider partially hydrogenated oil to be safe, when the FDA—and every scientific committee that has examined the topic—recognizes that the product causes thousands of deaths annually. Our petition describes the evidence demonstrating that partially hydrogenated oil causes tremendous harm to our health. In just a moment, Dr. Walter Willett will discuss that evidence in greater detail. Today, Dr. Willett and 27 other distinguished experts in cardiovascular disease and nutrition are calling on the FDA to stop the use of partially hydrogenated oil "as fully and quickly as possible."

The FDA has concluded that the benefits of requiring trans-fat labeling far, far outweigh the costs. For instance, in 1999 the FDA estimated that just requiring labeling, and not banning anything, would save several thousand lives per year and about $40 billion over 20 years. Using the FDA's data on *labeling*, CSPI estimated the benefits of *banning* partially hydrogenated oil. Depending on the assumptions, it appears that removing partially hydrogenated oil from the food supply would save upwards of 11,000 to 30,000 lives per year. In fact, when it comes to promoting health through better nutrition, getting rid of partially hydrogenated oil is probably the easiest, fastest, cheapest way to save tens of thousands of lives. In dollar terms, the benefits over the next 20 years of switching to healthier oils would be about $1 trillion, providing one of the biggest health bangs for the buck imaginable.

Now, is it actually *feasible* to eliminate partially hydrogenated oil? The answer is clearly "yes." Just go to a Whole Foods store, which carries a full line of products, not one of which contains partially hydrogenated oil. Or visit Denmark, which last January effectively banned partially hydrogenated oil. McDonald's, Kraft, Burger King, and every other company that markets in Denmark has adjusted to the ban. Here in the U.S., just look at the changes that Frito-Lay, Kraft, Pepperidge Farm, Ruby Tuesday, Tyson, Au Bon Pain, and other companies are making. Even, Crisco, long the epitome of trans-laden shortening, has been joined on shelves by a new trans-free Crisco. Americans will not go hungry, companies will not go broke, when partially hydrogenated oils are removed from the food supply.

Until the FDA acts on CSPI's petition, we are urging consumers to protect their health and send a signal to food manufacturers and restaurants by simply not buying foods made with partially hydrogenated oils. They can *literally* send a message to McDonald's by visiting www.TransFreeAmerica.com.

Let me finish by reminding people that, in their zeal to avoid trans fat, they should not forget about saturated fat, the most abundant artery-clogging fat in our diet. It occurs mostly in fatty meat and dairy products, pastries, and assorted other foods. We need to minimize our consumption of all types of harmful fats.