

POSITION STATEMENT

November 2015

~TRANS FATTY ACIDS~

Trans fatty Acids (TFA's) are a type of fat which has been present in the food supply of all humans and for thousands of years. TFA's can be found naturally occurring in foods derived from ruminant animals, such as butter, milk, cheese and meat and can also be found in some processed foods where liquid oils are processed to increase their firmness. Whether naturally occurring or occurring through food processing, the mechanism to form TFAs is the same. TFAs are formed by adding additional hydrogen atoms to certain fatty acids. In ruminant animals, this occurs in the digestive tract; In processed foods this occurs through a process called 'hydrogenation'.

During the 1990's researchers discovered the effect of TFAs in the diet was to raise the levels in the blood of 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol, while lowering the levels 'good' (HDL) cholesterol. Ongoing research suggested that TFAs conferred a higher risk for coronary heart disease than that of saturated fat. These adverse effects of TFAs were found, irrespective of whether the TFAs were occurring naturally or produced through food processing.

Historically, old fashioned margarines were a significant source of TFAs in the Australian diet. During the 1990's margarine manufacturers took decisive action to remove TFAs from their retail margarines, while also reducing the level in industrial margarines and shortenings. Today, the major source of TFAs in the Australian diet is through the consumption of dairy products and meat from ruminant animals. Despite this, the latest dietary intake data from FSANZ on TFA in the Australian diet has TFAs supplying around 0.5% of energy, which is half the upper limit recommended by the WHO. Of this low level, 73% is estimated to be from ruminant sources; the balance being from processed vegetable oils foods.

Despite the low levels of TFAs consumed at a population level, the Australian oilseed industry recognises that for some sectors of the community, the levels of TFAs in the diet of some individuals in those sectors will be above the maximum recommended by the WHO. The Australian oilseeds industry supports efforts by the public health sector to educate both the total population, and particularly those population groups whose diet is sub-optimal to moderate their intake of foods which may contain levels of TFAs above that recommended by the WHO.

=====

For further information: Contact the Australian Oilseeds Federation