

Department of health and human services

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Our country is in the midst of an obesity epidemic. The American Obesity Association provides that, “Currently, more than 64% of adults are either overweight or obese”-(The American Obesity Association, 2008). This estimate does not include the rising percentage of overweight children and teenagers in the United States which, in itself is alarming. Due to the way that we function as a society, the general public is overweight as a whole, and it is playing a devastating role in the future of our country. The weight crisis affects the overall health of our nation, thus causing the increase of health care costs and the staggering amount of money that our government spends to provide health care to the uninsured.

Our government however, is promptly acting to decrease the number of overweight individuals in our country, by working to pass laws and regulations aimed at making its citizens more health conscious regarding the foods we choose to eat. *The Federal Register* published a proposal regarding the labeling of packaged foods on April 4, 2005 explicitly for this purpose.

Authored by Jeffrey Shuren, and based on the suggestions of The Obesity Working Group, this proposal asserted that by modifying food labels to highlight the caloric content of packaged foods, Americans will be more easily able to determine the number of calories in a given product, thus assisting them in the battle of maintaining a normal weight and the fight against an unhealthy one. To combat the issue, The Obesity Working Group suggested making small changes on the packaging of foods such as displaying the caloric content on the front of the package rather than the back, stressing that these minor changes would greatly impact our nation's rising obesity rate-(Shuren, 2005).

In favor of the regulation, there are multiple benefits that would contribute to successfully ending the obesity problem America is facing. The obvious being that the public will be encouraged to buy foods that are healthy. Also, with buyer-friendly packaging, customers would be forced to be more informed about the products they purchase. Indeed it would not be such an inconvenience to glance at a package as opposed to studying the nutritional values on the back of it.

Even those who see no personal gain in shopping around to make health conscious buying decisions would subconsciously eat more healthily if the caloric content was staring them in the face from the supermarket shelves. Moreover, less money would be spent on educational programs intended to teach these very people the value of eating properly and the manner in which to do so. It is likely then that with the passing of a law such as this one that gradually the mind-blowing amount of overweight people inhabiting our country would decrease.

This gradual weight loss however, would not come free of charge. In opposition of the proposed regulation, there are numerous set backs that would arise affecting society in a negative manner. It would begin with the manufactures, who with the passing of this new law, would be forced to redesign their packaging. As the cost of the packaging increases for the manufacturer, the cost of the product will increase for the consumer. Retailers would loose money as well, since when the regulation becomes law, supermarkets and grocery stores will have mass amounts of goods that they legally cannot sell without it first being repackaged.

This too would drive up the cost of the food that we purchase. Furthermore, consider the competition that will develop amongst manufacturers should the regulation work in its intended purpose. Should the customers begin to pay attention to their caloric intake as The Obesity Working Group predicts, then they would refuse to buy products that have high calorie levels. Such an outcome would force manufacturers who produce unhealthy products to rethink their recipes and to strive to make food that contains fewer calories. With new recipes comes the need for different, often pricier ingredients.

This would drive up the demand for such health conscious ingredients, benefiting those industries. However, it would drive up the price for the consumers as well. The demand also has the potential to cause manufacturers to buy imported goods rather than from American companies. Additionally, the demand for those products which advertise a lower caloric content on their packaging would increase substantially, hence driving up the price to the consumer of these foods which the government is encouraging Americans to eat.

Next comes the issue of the workers who produce, package, and deliver the products that we buy and eat. If the companies who employ these people are forced to spend vast amounts of money to develop new packaging designs or to sell their products at all, then that leaves decreased amounts of money to pay the workers. The same holds true for those who work at supermarkets. Some might lose their jobs; others might be denied pay raises, upsetting the lives of millions of Americans.

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union represents over a million of this industry's workers alone-(The United Food and <https://assignbuster.com/department-of-health-and-human-services/>

Commercial Workers International Union, 2008). Without even considering the hundreds of similar unions and their members, that is an astounding amount of people who would potentially be affected. There are other special interest groups that could suffer as well. As the demand for ingredients increases, thus increasing costs, restaurants will suffer greatly as they struggle to buy the products they need to operate. Further, many could lose a great portion of their customers, since, as the public becomes more aware of the importance of healthy food choices they might decide not to eat in unhealthy restaurants any longer.

The National Restaurant Association represents another 13.1 million employees that might be displaced as a result of this regulation-(The National Restaurant Association, 2008). Finally, we must consider the jobs of the people who make their living teaching the public how to eat healthy. There is a good probability that with the passing of this regulation into law, many nutritionists might lose their jobs as well.

While this proposed regulation is appealing, and obviously a good natured attempt by our government to control the obesity problem our country is experiencing, it does not sufficiently address the issue at hand. The health of our nation's people is extremely important. For that reason, a meager idea such as this is not enough to effectively reduce the number of overweight people in America. Such alterations to packaged food might indeed help Americans struggling to control their weight, by drawing attention to the number of calories in a particular product.

However, it is unlikely that such a petty change would, in reality, greatly reduce the amount of overweight people in our country. Surely shoppers

would be more likely to notice the number, boldly displayed on products when they make their buying decisions, but we have no way of knowing how many will change their eating habits as a result. Those who do change their ways, and decide shop in a more health friendly manner would drive up food costs by encouraging the competitive nature of manufactures, increasing the demand of certain ingredients, and potentially causing job loss of thousands of hard working Americans.

Rather than experiencing a massive weight loss trend, in all probability American consumers would simply pay the price for rising food costs as a result of a regulation such as this one. If the government really wants to help solve the obesity problem, more language should be included in this proposed regulation that would help offset some of the loss the public would experience. As it stands, the benefit is slight, but still seriously under compensates for the detriment that would be suffered by the industries involved and the general public as a whole.

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