

House bill would limit some calorie labels

November 18 2015, by Mary Clare Jalonick

Supermarkets and pizza chains would get some relief from government calorie labeling rules under legislation approved by a House committee Wednesday.

Many restaurants and other food retail outlets, such as grocery stores, will have to post the new calorie labels, starting a year from now. The bill by Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., would leave the Food and Drug Administration rules requiring that labeling in place, but make it easier for some businesses to comply.

The FDA rules will require restaurants and other establishments that sell prepared foods and have 20 or more locations to post the calorie content of food "clearly and conspicuously" on their menus, menu boards and displays. That includes prepared foods at grocery and convenience stores and in movie theaters, bakeries, coffee shops, pizza delivery stores and amusement parks.

The bill approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, 36-12, would narrow labeling requirements for supermarkets, which have complained that the rules are confusing and burdensome, by allowing stores to use a menu or menu board in a prepared-foods area instead of putting labels on individual items.

It would also allow restaurants like pizza delivery chains that receive most of their orders remotely to post calories online instead of at the retail location. Pizza restaurants would also have more flexibility in the way they post calories and restaurants and retailers could determine what

constitutes a serving size, in some cases.

McMorris Rodgers said the bill "is not about the merits of displaying calorie information. It's about how we can improve existing regulations to benefit people."

The supermarket industry praised the legislation.

"If menu labeling is going to be required at grocery stores, then let's at least build some flexibility so it is worthwhile for consumers and workable in store environments," said Leslie Sarasin of the Food Marketing Institute.

Democrats said the bill would limit calorie transparency before the law has even gone into effect. Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., said the bill would "undermine the public health goal of providing clear, consistent calorie information to consumers."

The menu labeling rules were first required by Congress in 2010 health overhaul, but FDA took several years to write them as the supermarkets, convenience stores and pizza delivery companies aggressively lobbied against them. Those businesses said the rules would be more burdensome for them than they would be for restaurants, which typically have more limited offerings.

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Citation: House bill would limit some calorie labels (2015, November 18) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-11-house-bill-limit-calorie.html>

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