

IMACE Code of Practice on Trans Fatty Acids

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In June 1995 IMACE adopted a Code of Practice to reduce the level of Trans Fatty Acids in all margarines and spreads to less than 5% trans fatty acids, which is the same level as in butter. The Code of Practice covered retail margarines and margarines used as ingredients in food products. This code was further updated in 2003.

Current scientific consensus suggests that trans fatty acids (TFAs) are worse than saturated fatty acids (SAFAs) in terms of effect on lipoproteins. Additionally these reports show that there is no difference in the types of TFAs from ruminant and vegetable sources although the proportions of the various types of TFAs are different. Studies that have compared different types of TFA and isomer distributions have consistently shown similar adverse effects. There is no direct human data or other conclusive evidence to show that vegetable and ruminant TFAs have a different effect on human health.

Although many reports have acknowledged the efforts made by the margarine and fat spreads industry to reduce levels of TFAs in retail products to no more than 2% TFA on a fat basis, concern continues to be expressed about the higher levels of TFA present in other food products.

The manufacturers of margarines that are used as ingredients in food products have developed an extensive portfolio of margarines with less than 5% TFA on a fat basis and have encouraged food processors to use these products. A recent survey by IMACE shows that there has been a substantial increase in the use of these margarines with less than 5% TFA over the last 3 years.

However IMACE believes that in order to meet consumer concerns it should update and strengthen its' Code of Practice on TFA to the following i.e.

- That the previous Code of Practice for retail margarines and fat spreads should remain i.e. retail products should contain no more than 1% TFA on product basis, which typically is equivalent to no more than 2% TFA on fat basis.
- That all IMACE member companies should encourage their customers of margarines used as ingredients in food products to use margarines and fat spreads with no more than 2% TFA on a fat basis. However the final composition of the margarine and fat spread that is chosen remains the responsibility of the customer (s) involved based on the required functionality needed in the final food product.
- That retail blends and blended spreads which are made of a mixture of butter and vegetable fats should contain no more than 5% TFA on a fat basis.

In implementing these moves, IMACE recommends that care should be taken to ensure that the combined SAFA and TFA does not rise as this is counter to the general principle of improving the health qualities of the product.

IMACE supports mandatory labelling of the combined SAFA and TFA in all retail food products to ensure that the ultimate consumer can be informed of the nutritional content of food products, in line with the definition of TFA that is recommended by EFSA¹.

¹ EFSA definition of TFAs (EFSA Opinion on TFA, September 2004): *Trans fatty acids are unsaturated fatty acids that have at least one double bond in the trans configuration.*

