



Memorandum

Date MAY 17 2010

From Acting Director, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, HFS-1

Subject Experimental Studies of Nutrition Symbols on Food Packages
(OMB Control No. 0910-0655) – Request for OMB Exception

To Chief Statistician Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

RECOMMENDATION:

That OMB except research sponsored by FDA concerning nutrition symbols on food packages from OMB's moratorium on household surveys during the 2010 Census of Population and Housing period of March 1, 2010 through August 30, 2010.

BACKGROUND:

On January 19, 2010, OMB approved the proposed research entitled, "Experimental Studies of Nutrition Symbols on Food Packages." The research is intended to assess quantitatively consumer reactions to various front-of-package (FOP) nutrition labeling schemes. The studies will be a critical input to ensure the usefulness of FOP nutrition information provided to U.S. consumers.

Data collection commenced immediately after approval. Recently, while checking the data and conducting preliminary analyses of the data, FDA determined that an important piece of information was not reliably collected due to a contractor error. The data collection protocol of study 1, which examined examples of the existing symbols, was designed to record whether respondents clicked to see the Nutrition Facts label and when they did so. Unfortunately, the data collection operation failed to record such data consistently throughout the sample. Hence, the study collected no reliable data on this behavior. The data would inform how frequently respondents consulted the Nutrition Facts label when answering various questions about the products and whether there was any difference in this behavior between symbols.


NEED TO CONDUCT RESEARCH BEFORE SEPTEMBER 2010

The overall purpose of the studies is to help enhance FDA's understanding of consumer understanding and use of a selected sample of nutrition labeling schemes currently in use in the domestic market, and to examine whether certain schemes are better ways to impart useful nutrition information to U.S. consumers. The studies are part of the agency's continuing effort to enable consumers to make informed dietary choices and construct healthful diets.

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Given the importance and value of the data, we would like to have the contractor repeat study 1 as soon as possible, with the same specifications (e.g., 2,400 respondents from the same online consumer panel, same instrument, same labels), and including up to 200 pretests to make sure the click data are collected and collected correctly. The contractor has agreed to repeat the study.

FDA recognizes the importance of OMB's policy to minimize the collection of federal agency-sponsored household surveys in order to encourage cooperation with the 2010 Census of Population and Housing. However, it would adversely affect the quality and utility of the research to wait to repeat study 1 until after August 30, 2010, the end of the OMB policy. The quality of the research depends in part on conducting study 1 as close in time as possible to FOP labeling study 2, which examined examples of symbols that do not yet exist in the marketplace. The utility of the research is dependent on having the results available to policymakers working on the First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign.

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