EATING OUT AND OVEREATING

“Effects of ‘Fat Tax’ and Calorie Information on Restaurant Food Choices”

Washington, DC – For Immediate Release – The effect of numeric and symbolic calorie menu labeling on consumer food choices at restaurants is the subject of National C-FAR’s “Lunch~N~Learn” Hill Seminar on Monday, May 2, at noon in 1302 Longworth House Office Building. The featured speaker is Dr. Jayson Lusk, Professor and Willard Sparks Endowed Chair in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University.

“Diners provided with calorie information in the menu slightly reduced the total number of calories ordered,” says Lusk. “The economic value of the information provided by caloric labels was estimated to be between $3 and $4 per meal.”

“This presentation provides excellent perspectives on the value of federally funded food and agricultural research in producing the scientific outcomes and outreach needed to meet 21st century challenges and opportunities,” says Chuck Conner, President of the National Coalition for Food & Agricultural Research (National C-FAR).

Summary: This research determines the effect of numeric and symbolic calorie menu labeling relative to the effects of a “calorie tax” on food choice and caloric intake in a full-service restaurant. A 19-week field experiment was carried out in a full-service restaurant in which diners were randomly allocated to: 1) a control menu with no caloric information, 2) a menu with numeric caloric information, or 3) a menu with symbolic, stop-light caloric information. In the last seven weeks of the study, a “calorie tax” was implemented in which we increased (decreased) the price of higher (lower) calorie menu items. Results indicate that diners randomly allocated to menus with caloric information slightly reduced the total number of calories ordered, with the greatest reductions occurring from the symbolic menu in larger party sizes. Numeric information alone reduced the number of calories ordered by about 4.2% and symbolic information further reduced the number of calories ordered by 6.7% relative to the control. The “calorie tax” did not significantly affect the total number of calories ordered. Despite the relatively small effect on number of calories ordered, the economic value of the information provided by caloric labels was estimated to be between $3 and $4 per meal.

Dr. Lusk’s research has focused on questions related to what food attributes consumers want and are willing to pay for, how best to measure consumer preferences, and projecting the impacts of food policies and agribusiness decisions on consumer choice and welfare. Although he has conducted extensive nationwide surveys on these topics, he is perhaps best known for using research methods that involve real food and real money to arrive at a more accurate depiction of what food consumers really do (as opposed to what they say they will do). His presentation will be available at http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp. The seminar is open to the public and the media.

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NATIONAL C-FAR is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based, and customer-led coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and extension community, serving as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, extension, and education. National C-FAR’s Hill Seminar Series, now in its sixth year, regularly presents leading-edge researchers working to provide answers to pressing issues confronting the public and Congress. The Hill Seminar Series helps demonstrate the value of public investment in food and agricultural research—investment that returns 45 percent per year on average.

Go to http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp for more information about the seminar series and past topics. Interviews with National C-FAR President Chuck Conner are available by request. For additional information, go to www.ncfar.org; or contact Tom Van Arsdall, Executive Director, at tom@vanarsdall.com or (703) 509-4746.