

BUSINESS FEBRUARY 10, 2010

Pepsi, Coke Support Calorie-Labeling Effort

By JOHN KELL

The beverage industry unveiled new labeling plans that will move the calorie content to the front of their beverage containers by the end of 2012, as part of a wider initiative pushed by First Lady Michelle Obama.

PepsiCo Inc. and Coca-Cola Co. were among those to issue statements supporting the initiative, which will cover vending machines and fountain-drink equipment. Containers of up to 20 ounces will be labeled with total calories, while multiserve-container labels will be based on 12-ounce servings.

Mrs. Obama's campaign is part of a government effort to reframe the debate about the nation's expanding waistline. The push comes after the U.S. obesity rate grew rapidly through the 1980s and 1990s, although figures released last month show the increase has slowed.

Several sectors of the food industry, including packaged-food makers and fast-food restaurants, have come under fire over the years regarding calorie counts and nutrition. A number of companies in recent years have moved to improve the nutritional content of their products, including reductions in sugar and salt content. Some cities and states have responded by requiring restaurants to post the calorie and fat content of their offerings.

The beverage industry is also committing to continue reducing the beverage calories in the marketplace, according to the American Beverage Association. That includes efforts to offer smaller portion sizes and further market low-calorie beverages. The industry is also looking at the feasibility of expanding the current information it offers on their nutrition-facts panels.

Pepsi's efforts have included calorie reductions, reformulations and smaller portion sizes for some of its products, such as its Frito-Lay snacks.

Coca-Cola, meanwhile, said its commitment builds on the leadership the company established in December, when Coca-Cola announced plans to provide front-of-package calorie labeling for nearly all products by 2012. Coca-Cola said the process will begin this year and include coordination with the Food and Drug Administration.

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