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FOOD INNOVATION CENTER WILL EXPLORE FOOD ALLERGEN LAWS

By Peg Herring

SOURCE: Carol Coren, 503-872-6657

PORTLAND - New legislation on the labeling and management of food allergens will require food processors to inform consumers in clear, simple language about the presence of major food allergens in their products.

The Food Innovation Center, a partnership program of Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Agriculture in Portland, will host a series of webcast conferences designed to help the northwest food industry understand the new law and adjust their products and labels to help consumers. The seminar series is co-sponsored by the Northwest Food Processors Association, OSU Extension and the Oregon Chapter of the Institute of Food Technologists.

The first seminar, “Food Allergen Labeling and the New Law,” will be held on Tuesday, November 30, 2004 at 9:30 AM in the Food Innovation Center Classroom at 1207 NW Naito Parkway in Portland. It will be simulcast on the Internet through the Food Innovation Center website, <http://fic.oregonstate.edu> . This program will feature an overview of the new law and illustrate how its requirements compare with current FDA guidelines for labeling and handling of food allergens. Dr. Yanyun Zhao, professor of food science and technology at OSU will moderate the conference. Charles Breen, FDA’s Northwest Region District Director will speak.

The new legislation, scheduled to take effect in 2006, will require food manufactures to plainly identify the presence of eight major food allergens: milk, egg, peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, wheat

and soy. Currently, these ingredients may be listed as “flavorings” or labeled with cryptic names such as “casein” or “gluten.”

The second workshop, “Plant Management and Testing of Food Allergens,” will explore strategies for managing these allergens in food processing to avoid cross-contamination. That workshop will be held live and, by special arrangement, will be available by webcast from the floor of the Northwest Food Processors Convention and Exposition in Portland on January 17, 2005.

Dr. Steve Taylor is the featured speaker at the third seminar, “Low Dose Exposure to Food Allergens: Policy Implications for Food Processors” to be held March 29, 2005.

Dr. Taylor and a panel of industry and government speakers will explore the establishment of science-based food allergen thresholds. This research has numerous benefits to both the food industry and to the food-allergic consumer: reduction of allergen precautionary labeling on food products, a more meaningful label on food products and an increase in food choices, a true measure of "how clean is clean?" for the food industry. This session will explore these and other benefits, as well as the role of allergen thresholds in risk assessment.

A fourth and final seminar will be webcast in June 2005 as an update on regulations pending implementation of the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act.

All except the January program will be broadcast as one- to two-hour webcast presentations originating from the Food Innovation Center in Portland. Questions may be asked by viewers via e-mails during the webcast. An archived recording of the conference presentations will be available on the Food Innovation Center website throughout 2005. Conferees attending the program at the Food Innovation Center will be charged a \$10 fee to cover costs for facilities and light refreshments. The webcasts will be available on the Internet for no charge and will be accessible at <http://fic.oregonstate.edu>.

The event is open to the general public but is particularly important for people who manufacture, prepare and serve food. Those who wish to attend the first seminar in person on November 30 are

asked to register in advance by sending an e-mail to fic@oregonstate.edu or by calling 503-872-6680.

For additional information about the series of Allergen Information Conference webcasts, contact Carol Coren at Oregon State University's Food Innovation Center Experiment Station, 503-872-6657. For more information on seminar content, call Connie Kirby, Northwest Food Processors Association at 503-327-2201.

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