



2801 Fish Hatchery Road | Madison, WI 53713 | (608) 270-9950 | (800) 589-3211 | FAX (608) 270-9960 | www.wirestaurant.org
January 9, 2024

TO: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

FR: Susan Quam, Executive Vice President

Written Testimony for Information Only

AB 555 Labeling of a Food Product as Containing Lab-Grown Animal Cells

Thank you Chair Tranel and Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on AB 555 Labeling of a Food Product as Containing Lab-Grown Cells.

Restaurants in Wisconsin and around the country take the responsibility to keep the public informed regarding product ingredients seriously. Consumers want to know where and how their food was grown and produced and for many restaurants, informing customers of this type of information is also a part of their marketing strategy to gain repeat customers.

However, when it comes to mandatory labeling laws that impact restaurant menus, there are factors that need to be considered. The WRA has opposed mandatory labeling on restaurant menus, due to the difficulty in changing menus at the last minute because of product changes. We do not oppose labeling of products on packaging, specification sheets, marketing materials or in other retail situations where the items is packaged for direct sale to the consumer.

The restaurant supply chain is at times very volatile, and it can be hard for our supplier partners to always have the exact product a restaurant has ordered. In these cases, the supplier may bring a substitute product that is close to the specs outlined by the restaurant but may not meet every one exactly. Depending on the situation, a restaurant may accept or reject the substitution, but at times they have to make the choice of accept it or have no product for a busy weekend.

We are concerned that if the provisions of AB 555 were put in place, without an exemption for restaurant menus, the possibility of a restaurant inadvertently violating the mandate could happen. As outlined above, ingredient substitutions happen regularly in the restaurant industry. If a restaurant or the supplier was not fully aware that a substitute product contained meat product covered under this bill, they would open themselves up for enforcement action or consumer litigation.

For the majority of restaurants, changing a menu at the "last minute" to include changes in ingredients covered by mandatory labeling is not possible. Even with today's on-demand printing technology, few restaurants print their own menus. They work with supplier partners who help them layout and develop attractive designs that are meant to work for as long as possible, because changes/reprinting is expensive. For this reason, most federal labeling requirements exempt restaurant menus.

We encourage the bill's authors to exempt restaurant menus from this labeling requirement. This exemption would not remove the responsibility of the restaurant to disclose the origin of its menu items should a customer ask, just as they are currently required to do for allergens. Nor would it prevent restaurants from voluntarily complying with the labeling, if they have the ability to print menus in-house.

(Continued on next page)

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association (WRA) represents over 7,000 restaurant locations statewide and represents all segments of the restaurant and hospitality industry. Our membership includes food establishments of all types and sizes, such as seasonal drive-ins, supper clubs, diners, bars, locally owned franchisees, fine-dining, and hotels/resorts. The majority of our members have alcohol licenses. Over 75 percent of our membership is independent restaurants or restaurant groups. Regardless of ownership type, all restaurants are the cornerstones of their neighborhoods and communities. Restaurants not only provide great food, drink, and hospitality, they support schools, teams, charities and churches with fundraising and donations. They provide meeting places to celebrate, mourn and organize, or just provide a safe, tasty meal for a busy family.