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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

RESTAURANTS GRADING BEGINS IN NEW YORK

NYC restaurants get ready to learn their ABC's

By KAREN MATTHEWS (AP)

NEW YORK — New York City's 24,000 restaurants include fast food outlets selling chicken by the bucket and temples of haute cuisine where multi-course tasting menus can cost hundreds of dollars per person — before the wine.

But whether they have three stars from Michelin or three flavors of milkshake, all the restaurants soon will share some common ground — a letter-based A, B or C — grading system aimed at informing diners about cleanliness and food safety.

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Letter grade systems also are in effect in North and South Carolina. Larry Michael, head of food protection for North Carolina's Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said the system works well.

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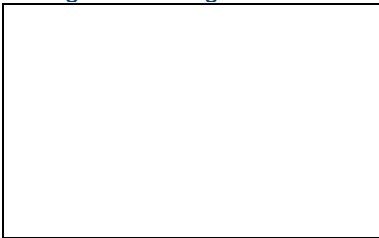
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Michael Appleton for The New York Times

DEGREES OF HYGIENE Ron Riccardi prints placards bearing letter grades A, B and C that will be posted at the more than 24,000 restaurants in New York City.

By the end of Wednesday, several restaurant windows in New York are quite likely to display a new attraction alongside the usual menus and reviews: a brilliantly colored placard bearing a letter grade.

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Michael Appleton for The New York Times

AN EDUCATION Charles Attoh, a health supervisor, at a workshop for owners in Flushing, Queens.

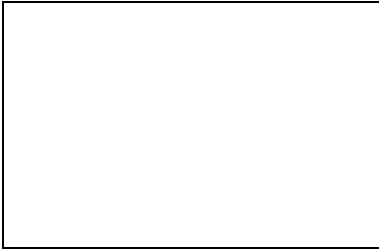
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John Marshall Mantel for The New York Times

IN THE FIELD Training inspectors on new software. The city has hired 23 additional inspectors.

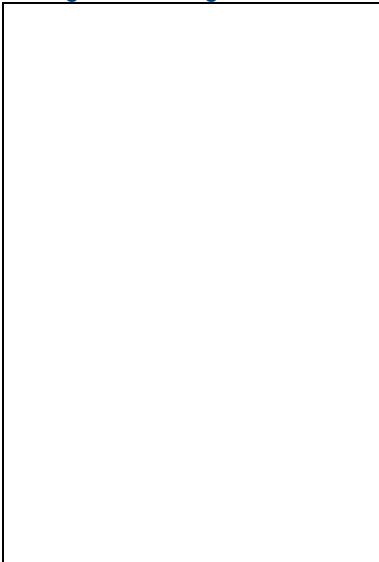
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John Marshall Mantel for The New York Times

UPGRADES Health department technicians updated hundreds of hand-held computers for inspectors.

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Michael Appleton for The New York Times

Stacks of grade certificates for the new cleanliness grading system being implemented by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

But much less visible is the months-long effort by city health officials to prepare for this day — the debut of their controversial new system to rate the cleanliness of the city's more than 24,000 restaurants with an A, B or C.

The [Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#) has added 23 inspectors to its 157 to conduct annual visits that are expected to rise by more than one-third, to 85,000 from 60,000. The wireless hand-held computers that inspectors use to calculate scores have been upgraded with new hard drives, memory cards and software.

The department's printing presses have produced 28,000 letter-grade placards and enough new procedural guides for every food establishment in the city. Workshops to help restaurant employees and operators understand the new system — conducted in English, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese — have attracted about 2,000 participants.

And starting Wednesday, a new Web site, nyc.gov/health/restaurants, will offer the public up-to-date specifics on each restaurant's inspection, as well as maps and even street views of the establishments.

"This is the biggest change we've implemented in many years," said Dr. Thomas Farley, commissioner of the health department, which has budgeted \$3.2 million for the effort.

Public pressure exerted by the letter grades, Dr. Farley said, will "force restaurants to be diligent about good food-safety practices."

The city is not the only body gearing up. Two weeks ago, the [New York State Restaurant Association](#), which has fought the grading system since it was first proposed 19 months ago, sent a letter to some 3,500 eating establishments, rallying opposition and raising money for a possible legal challenge, said Robert Bookman, legislative counsel for the group's New York City chapters.

"We don't know that the government can compel you to post a sign that expresses an opinion about your business that you do not share," Mr. Bookman said.

The new ratings will arrive piecemeal. During inspections on Wednesday, only the 8-by-10-inch placards designating an A grade are expected to be posted, since restaurants that receive a lower grade will automatically be inspected again at a later date. If the restaurants are still unhappy with their grade, they have the right to seek an administrative hearing.

Indeed, the first B's and C's may not be posted until late August, and rating placards will not reach all restaurants until fall 2011.

The new inspection rules require restaurateurs to post the placards prominently, displaying ratings that were previously available only at the health department or on its Web site. Failure to do so will be punishable by a \$1,000 fine, with additional penalties for counterfeiting.

The placards have been knocked out at the rate of 6,000 an hour in the department's print shop in the basement of 80 Centre Street. The blue A card will correspond to 0 to 13 points under the old system, which imposed numerical penalties for each violation. A green B will designate a less sanitary 13 to 27 points, and an orange C will represent 28 points or more. A black-and-white "grade pending" sign will be posted in restaurants that are appealing their scores.

It is perhaps a measure of the department's optimism that Nicholas J. Monello, director of printing operations, said he had fulfilled orders for 9,375 A's — more than the number of B's and C's combined. All have been numbered and embossed to prevent counterfeiting.

The department has replaced its paper documents with an electronic system to handle the increased demand that it expects for administrative tribunals, the courts that assess fines and adjudicate disputed inspections, said Daniel Kass, a deputy commissioner. For the first time, online settlements will be permitted, if restaurants acknowledge their violations in exchange for discounted fines.

More than 200 hand-held scoring devices have been rebuilt. Every unit "had to be encrypted, which took from two to three hours for each," said Robert D. Edman, an assistant health commissioner.

"That's so that if they are lost," he continued, "no one can access their information."

Inspectors have attended four-hour training sessions on letter-grade issues, and health officials have held dozens of educational meetings with restaurant workers.

One morning this month, in the basement auditorium of the Queens Public Library in Flushing, Elliott S. Marcus, an associate health commissioner, answered questions from 70 restaurant workers and owners.

"You have to post the cards on a front window, door or exterior wall within five feet of the main street entrance, from four to six feet in height," Mr. Marcus said.

Many restaurateurs contend that the new system is confusing, and some have predicted a mass shuttering of businesses rated B and C. Through months of public debate, the department removed many inspection categories from the scoring process, so that restaurants would not receive low grades based on administrative violations like a failure to post informational signs. Some requirements, like those governing food temperature, have been relaxed.

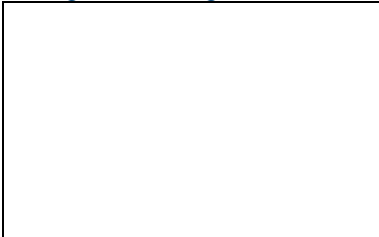
Still, Mr. Bookman, counsel for the restaurant association, said, "We don't think they went nearly far enough in making changes."

At the Queens workshop, Anna Nikopoulos, owner of Pete's Cafe in Bayside, complained that "they are trying to implement too much here in a recession."

But Sarvjit Singh, owner of the Sohna Punjab restaurant in Bellerose, said he had no worries about maintaining a clean restaurant. "I tell my chef he should be cooking as if he were eating that food," he said.

Buried deep in the health care legislation that [President Obama](#) signed on Tuesday is a new requirement that will affect any American who walks into a [McDonald's](#), [Starbucks](#) or Burger King. Every big restaurant chain in the nation will now be required to put calorie information on their menus and drive-through signs.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Ramin Talaie/Bloomberg News

In New York, Starbucks displays calorie data. Soon, chains nationwide will be required to do so.

Multimedia

In other words, as soon as 2011 it will be impossible to chomp down on a Big Mac without knowing that it contains over 500 [calories](#), more than a quarter of the Agriculture Department's 2,000-calorie daily guideline.

The legislation also requires labels on food items in vending machines, meaning that anybody tempted by a king-size Snickers bar will know up front that it packs 440 calories.

The measure is intended to create a national policy modeled on a requirement that has already taken effect in New York City and was to go into effect in 2011 in places like California and Oregon. The new federal law requires restaurant chains with 20 or more outlets to disclose calorie counts on their food items and supply information on how many calories a healthy person should eat in a day.

“I think it is an historic development,” said Kelly D. Brownell, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and [Obesity](#) at Yale. Consumers spend more than half their food dollars outside of the home, he said, “and when people eat away from home they eat more and they eat worse. And part of the reason may be because they don’t know what’s in [fast foods](#), and they’re often shocked to find out.”

While Mr. Brownell acknowledged that some consumers will ignore the nutritional information, he said labeling would affect the decisions of enough people to create a public health benefit.

“The broader issue is that this firmly establishes the government’s role in improving the nation’s [nutrition](#),” he said.

The measure was approved by Congress with little public discussion, in part because restaurant chains supported it. They had spent years fighting such requirements, but they were slowly losing the battle. Confronting a potential patchwork of conflicting requirements adopted by states and cities, they finally asked Congress to create a single national standard.

“We have been strong advocates and supporters in trying to ensure this provision became law, and are extremely pleased that it was signed into law today,” Sue Hensley, a spokeswoman for the National Restaurant Association, said on Tuesday. “The association and the industry were supportive because consumers will see the same types of information in more than 200,000 restaurant locations across the country.”

Exactly when consumers will see that information is unclear, however. The legislation requires the [Food and Drug Administration](#) to propose specific regulations no later than a year from now, but completing the rules could take longer. If a legal battle ensues, as often happens with new federal regulations, the effective date could conceivably be years away.

Passage of the measure provoked aggravation among some free-enterprise groups, who saw it as another unnecessary government intrusion into private decision-making. Critics of the new law also contend that there is little evidence to show that menu labeling leads people to eat better.

“Frankly, it seems to me that whether I’m buying an apple or a Big Mac from McDonald’s, if they want to sell it to me without any information, I have a perfect right to buy it,” said Sam Kazman, general counsel for the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market advocacy group. “This simply is not a federal issue.”

Under the new legislation, restaurants will be required to display calorie information for standard menu items as well as calories for each serving of food at a [salad](#) bar or a buffet line. The chains will not have to post calorie information for daily specials and limited-time items.

More than a dozen states have been considering labeling measures or have already passed them, though many have not yet taken effect. The new legislation overrides many existing laws, though some localities will be able to continue enforcing rules that are more stringent than the federal requirements. New York City, for instance, is expected to continue requiring chains with 15 or more outlets to post nutritional data, compared with the standard of 20 outlets in the federal law.

Supporters of the legislation say that even if menu labeling does not inspire consumers to eat better, they should be told what they are putting in their mouths.

“You don’t need a study that proves anything,” Mr. Brownell said. “You just have a right to know.”

Mr. Kazman said that consumers who want that information could look it up on the Internet. And he added that he was concerned that if Americans did not slim down as a result of menu labeling, the government might require restaurants to take further action.

“They’ll decide the font’s not big enough or the words are not scary enough and they’ll push for more,” he said. “I don’t think this is taking us down a very appetizing course.”

William Neuman contributed reporting.

New on the menu at NYC restaurants: Health Department grades of A, B or C

By: KAREN MATTHEWS
Associated Press
07/27/10 9:25 PM EDT

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That will change when restaurants are required to post their grade in a prominent spot. Grading begins in July, but it will take a little more than a year to grade all of the city's existing restaurants, according to the health department.

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Get Your Restaurant Noticed With Press Releases

How would you like to have an article about your restaurant appear in the newspaper instead of just being one of the many advertisements littering the pages?

The simplest way to make this happen is by sending a press release to your local media outlets (newspaper, radio, and tv). Approx. 70% of the material in newspapers is the result of press releases. Everyday, your local newspaper (or television station) must come up with new and worthwhile stories to fill their pages with.

Benefits of Press Releases

Press Releases are an amazing way to promote and get free advertising for your restaurant. A steady flow of news helps to make a small business more visible to the public and creates favorable interest in its activities.

A press release that results in a quarter page story about your restaurant can be worth thousands of dollars of free advertising. When your business is the focus of an article in the newspaper, their inherent authority and established trust is transferred to your business. After all, if the newspaper deemed your restaurant worthy of writing about then you must be important.

However, an advertisement of the same size that must be repeated constantly for consumers to become familiar with it. The price for a single 1/4 page advertisement can run anywhere from 0 in a local newspaper all the way up to ,000 for one in the New York Times. Then consider the fact that an ad must be viewed an average of 10 times before a consumer notices it.

What is a press release?

Press releases-are brief, printed statements that outline the major facts of a news story in journalistic style...a small business may need to prepare press releases in order to disseminate new [information](#) about its products, services, operations, or other activities.

In general, a newsworthy story should be timely, of general or human interest, and somewhat unusual.

In his book *Public Relations for the Entrepreneur and the Growing Business*, Norman Soderberg lists several possible types of news stories that a small business could generate. For example, the promotion, transfer, or hiring of personnel, an upcoming event, the offering of a new product and joining an association are all newsworthy events that might occur in a small business.

In addition, human interest stories might arise from the unusual hobbies or avocations of employees, the success of company-sponsored sports teams or events, or the company's participation in charity or community activities. If a small business received an award or a visit from a celebrity, these events might provide impetus for a news story as well.

Formatting A Press Release

It is crucial that your press release be professionally written and in the correct format. More than 80% of press releases are thrown in the garbage can because they are not in the correct format or aren't newsworthy.

TaDa – the Travel and Dining Association, an association for independent [restaurants](#), has eliminated this problem for its members by emailing them 4 different professionally prepared press releases each month that they just have to customize with the restaurant's name and their contact information. For more information about TaDa, go to www.mytada.biz.

For an example of a correctly formatted press release, [click here](#).

Build A Relationship With Your Local Media Professionals

It can only help your business if you take the time to develop a relationship with your local media professionals. It is a good idea to start by finding not only which department but also a specific person, if possible, to send your press releases to. Then go one step further and invite them to dine at your restaurant. Having a mutually beneficial relationship with members of your local press is truly priceless.

Press releases are one of the most cost-effective ways of attracting new customers and increasing visits by your existing customers because they're essentially free advertising. The hour or two it takes to write is more than worth the thousands of dollars of free advertising and new business, one can bring through your door.

Miss Bayfield is one of the founders of the Travel and Dining Association (TaDa) an association dedicated to providing independent restaurants with the tools they need to compete. For more information, please visit www.mytada.biz and www.doyoutada.com

Nutrition Analysis Tools Will Help National Restaurant Association Members Enhance Menus

FoodCALC, Healthy Dining, and Silliker to provide discounts to Association members

July 13, 2010

Contact: [Annika Stensson](#) (202) 973-3677, [Mike Donohue](#) (202) 331-5902

(Washington, D.C.) Members of the National Restaurant Association now have access to a best-in-class suite of nutrition-analysis providers at discounted rates to help them plan and enhance

their menus. The Association has partnered with FoodCALC, Healthy Dining, and Silliker to offer valuable, personalized services to restaurants of all types.

“Restaurateurs have an increasing interest in obtaining accurate nutrition information of the dishes they serve, but the analysis process has presented challenges,” said David Gilbert, chief operator officer of the National Restaurant Association. “With the new law on nutrition disclosure in effect for certain restaurants, it has become imperative to find solutions to those challenges. That is why we partnered with the best nutrition-analysis providers in the business to meet our members’ needs for customized service at affordable rates.”

Because different types of restaurants have unique needs when it comes to nutrition analysis of menu items, the National Restaurant Association partnered with three providers that offer distinct forms of analysis. The Association’s partners are:

MenuCalc, a FoodCALC® product, is a web-based recipe nutrition-analysis software solution exclusively designed for restaurant operators that provides easy-to-use, low-cost options based on individual needs. With 24/7 secure access for multiple users, MenuCalc is backed by a staff of registered dietitians and technology experts and live support. For demonstrations and a free recipe analysis trial, visit www.menucalc.com or call (888) 804-0001.

Healthy Dining offers a team of masters-level nutrition professionals, registered dietitians and a doctoral level researcher to provide nutrition consultation and analysis services. Services include nutrient analysis (calories, fat, sodium, etc.), allergen declaration, development of gluten-free menus, and guidance in complying with menu labeling legislation. For more information, visit www.healthydiningfinder.com or call (800) 953-DINE (3463).

Silliker offers expert laboratory, technical and information services to help companies comply with menu labeling requirements. The company’s chemists and research and development professionals can help substantiate nutrition claims, and address analytical challenges posed by variables in menu item preparation. For more information, visit www.SillikerRestaurantNutritionals.com or e-mail info@silliker.com.

On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed into law the health care reform bill, which includes a provision that creates a national, uniform nutrition-disclosure standard for restaurants. The provision requires chain restaurants with 20 or more locations to provide specific nutrition labeling information. Those restaurants must post calories on menus, menu boards and drive-thru boards. Buffets, salad bars and other self-service items are also included and will be required to provide caloric information adjacent to the item. Establishments must also provide additional nutrition information in writing (e.g., a brochure) upon request. This additional written information includes calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, sugars, dietary fiber and protein.

While the law took effect when the bill was signed, mandatory requirements aren’t expected to take effect until after FDA finalizes regulations telling restaurateurs how to comply. The FDA has until March 23, 2011, to propose implementing regulations, followed by a public comment period, and then the issuance of the final rule.

Learn more about the [new menu labeling law](#) on the Association’s website.

Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which comprises 945,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of nearly 13 million employees. Together with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to lead America’s restaurant industry into a new era of prosperity, prominence, and participation, enhancing the quality of life for all we serve. For more

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