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Restaurant Association of Maryland Statement

Baltimore City Salt Reduction Task Force Report and Recommendations September 30, 2009

“The *Restaurant Association of Maryland* is committed to working in partnership with the public health community and government to promote and engage in voluntary salt reduction efforts. We appreciate that Baltimore City officials recognize the importance of bringing our industry to the table to help provide perspective on this initiative.

We recognize and understand that sodium intake that exceeds recommended dietary guidelines is a public health concern for those consumers with cardiovascular disease and hypertension. We believe that sodium reduction efforts must include both private and public sectors, and address all food, including packaged, branded, private label, prepared foods, delis, bakeries, restaurants and institutional foodservice (hospitals, prisons, cafeterias, schools, etc).

To overcome workforce challenges and satisfy consumer demand for faster service, many foodservice establishments now rely on the convenience of “heat and serve” foodservice products that have been manufactured by food processors. Because these products are not made from ‘scratch’ on-site, nor custom-formulated for the particular foodservice establishment, it has been difficult, historically, for the end-user to control the sodium level of these products. As an industry, we are working more closely with foodservice suppliers to encourage sodium reductions.

Many restaurants that continue to make nearly everything from ‘scratch’ are already experimenting with spice blends, herbs, new condiments and acidic ingredients to compensate for reduced sodium.

The reality is that consumer preferences remain an essential part of the solution. Restaurant customers often do not welcome changes in their favorite food products, particularly changes that alter taste. Salt is an important part of the taste experience – not only directly, but also in the way it functions to enhance other flavors. For these reasons, it is difficult to remove salt entirely. However, industry research suggests that sodium levels in food can be gradually reduced over time with little or no negative consumer feedback.

Public education about the importance of sodium reduction, physical activity and a well-balanced diet must be supported collaboratively by industry, the public health community and government agencies. Together, we can make a positive difference through voluntary efforts to encourage and support healthier lifestyles.”

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. The Restaurant Association of Maryland is a 3,000 plus member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the state of Maryland. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with some of the challenges facing the economy and the Foodservice Industry. They believed that, once united, they could accomplish more for the industry and their respective businesses than if each wrestled the problems alone. Over the ensuing years RAM has done all this and much more. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by a 30-40-member board of restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. www.marylandrestaurants.com