

By David Pierson

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It turns out America's health fixation has been a boon for butter.

Consumption of the creamy spread hit a 40-year high in the U.S. in 2012 as more Americans turned to natural foods and rejected products heavy in trans fats like margarine.

Per-capita butter consumption rose to 5.6 pounds in 2012, up from a low of 4.1 pounds in 1997, according to the American Butter Institute. In the decade starting 2002, butter consumption grew 25%.

Voice

"Consumers are changing their perception of food and looking for healthier alternatives. They're moving away from highly processed foods and artificial ingredients," Anuja Miner, executive director of the American Butter Institute, said in a phone interview Tuesday.

The Arlington, Va.-based trade association represents roughly 90% of the nation's butter producers and recently launched a marketing campaign on social media called "Go Bold with Butter."

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The growing popularity of butter coincided with more understanding about the health hazards of its processed counterpart.

Trans fats are vegetable oils that have been blended with hydrogen to boost shelf life and mimic the qualities of butter or lard. But research shows the ingredient raises levels of LDL cholesterol – also known as bad cholesterol. Trans-fats consumption depresses levels of the better HDL cholesterol, which helps prevent heart disease.

The Food and Drug Administration proposed new rules in November that would all but ban the artery-clogging fats.

That's given a boost to dairy producers. California and Wisconsin are the nation's leading butter manufacturing states.

Miner said about 40% of butter sales go to consumers and the remainder heads for use by food manufacturers.

Despite butter's relatively healthy benefits compared to alternatives, it's still not a good idea to gorge on, say, [deep fried butter on a stick](#).

The American Heart Assn. says moderation is the key. The group recommends limiting saturated fats such as butter to less than 7% of a person's daily calorie intake.