

Collection and Synthesis of Nutrition and Price Data Across Supermarket Retailers

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POSITION DESCRIPTION

Nutrition facts are mandated to appear on the outside of all consumable products in the United States. Recently, there has been a number of studies prompted by the national debates on the obesity and diabetes epidemic.¹ There have also been a number of successful lawsuits against companies for excluding or misrepresenting the contents of food.²

The Food and Drug Administration does not currently require or provide a centralized database of the contents of sold food commodity items. We propose to compile an evolving, comprehensive database of the food contents of products sold in the largest supermarket retailers in the United States³. We can also compile the price at which the products are sold to allow comparison across different stores.

The nutritional data will allow consumers to easily calculate the combined nutritional contents of their grocery purchases. By facilitating comparison across brands and stores, correlated with the actual contents of the outlets in their area, the users will be able to apply a number of analytical techniques to the database's contents.

Social welfare agencies such as Food Stamps and Social Security will be able to connect their clients with the

1 <http://bigdataforhealth.weebly.com/index.html>

2 <http://www.law360.com/articles/499170/2013-s-key-rulings-in-food-mislabeling-litigation>

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_supermarket_chains_in_the_United_States

best nutrition at the closest location with the lowest price. These services will allow disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, the elderly, and mothers, to better find the products they need and provide a platform for others to help them obtain the items easily. We can solicit the cooperation of the large retailers, and even smaller local stores, for inclusion in the project.

In addition to whatever support can be obtained from the retailers and manufacturers themselves, we can invite citizen researchers to photograph nutritional labels in the store and upload their collections to our database. Design of an automatic image translator for input to the database would assist in facilitating these contributions.

I offer this preliminary sketch of the project with the hope of bringing together skilled data scientists and concerned parties to begin assembling components for the project.

REFERENCES

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