

May 19, 2005

Acting Commissioner Lester Crawford, Ph.D., D.V.M.
Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane, 14-71
Rockville, MD 20857

Re: Comments on Docket #2004P-0483 and Rulemaking Docket #200N-0456 – There is an urgent need to modernize the rules regulating the labeling of single-serving foods.

Dear Mr. Crawford,

It is time to bring more honesty to the labeling of American foods and beverages. Food products require labels that reflect consumption, offering people the information they need in a manner they understand and is relevant to the way the package is consumed.

Nutrition has once again become a national priority. Obesity rates have soared over the last decade, earning national news in August 2003 when the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) declared that a staggering 59 million Americans are obese. In response, the USDA redesigned the food pyramid, community and youth organizations incorporated more exercise into their programs, and parents have been advised to actively promote healthy lifestyles within the home.

However, to succeed at defeating what the White House has called a problem reaching “epidemic proportions,” a unified approach is necessary. Providing accurate and honest nutritional information to consumers is a critical step alongside other national initiatives. Guidelines that determine labeling standards on food products must be revised to present nutritional facts to consumers in a manner that easily enables them to make educated decisions about their diet.

Single-serving labels are a major source of misleading information. A large number of products in the food industry are packaged for consumption in a single-sitting but nutritional information reflects a product intended for multiple-servings. For example, a traditional 20 oz. bottle of soda found in many vending machines contains 2.5 servings, although the bottle is marketed as a refreshment for one person at one moment in time. The labels need to reflect the customer’s expectations.

Americans face choices in their diet on a daily basis. Essential to eating well and reducing unhealthy quantities of additives such as sugar is access to information – consumers need to be informed to make accurate decisions. For example, most consumers do not have any idea how much added sugar is hiding in their every day foods. Foods often labeled as “healthy” – breakfast cereals, juice drinks, peanut butter, and salad dressings – often contain an excessive amount of sugar. Americans need to have access to this information in a manner that corresponds to their intake, enabling the consumer to easily identify products that fit their requirements.

The flexibility provided to manufacturers through the current interpretation of FDA regulations overlooks the consumer as the primary benefactor. At this moment, the nutritional value on single serving food labels is distorted. The FDA must update its regulations and strengthen the nutritional labeling requirements.

Honest Tea has taken the voluntary step of disclosing nutritional information such as total calorie content and added sugar amount on an honest “per serving” size – one full bottle instead of the standard 8-ounce serving. We hope our colleagues in the industry will follow our lead to increase disclosure on nutritional labels so the American consumer can make informed choices when they buy all of our foods. Honest Tea urges the FDA to promote similar practices – renew the rules outlining single-serving food labels and provide Americans with “transparency for choice” – the choice to choose a healthy lifestyle.

Honest Tea fully supports FDA regulations that would increase the level of disclosure on nutritional panels and provide the consumer with more complete information.

Honestly Yours,

Seth Goldman
President & TeaEO