

ADMIN PROCEEDINGS STAFF

April 8, 1980 ~~APR 10~~ AM 9:39

Mrs. Thomas F. Kelly
23 Fairview Avenue
Alherton, CA 94025

Dear Mrs. Kelly:

In your recent letter you commented upon the sodium in food products.

In other than standardized foods, the Food and Drug Administration cannot compel food manufacturers to follow specific recipes. Food companies formulate their products based on information derived from past sales and, presumably, consumer preference.

The labeling of salt in food products was among the topics discussed at hearings held by the FDA in conjunction with two other Federal Agencies (the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture).

As a result of the comments we received at those hearings, we have issued a notice in the Federal Register stating our intention to require quantitative declaration of total sodium and potassium as part of nutrition labeling. In addition, we propose to seek additional legal authority to require quantitative ingredient labeling as part of the ingredient statement on all foods.

Since FDA's Dockets Management Branch is accepting written comments on these tentative positions, I am forwarding your letter to them.

You mention that two years have elapsed since this Agency has concluded that salt was a health hazard. I am not certain what report you are referring to. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has received an evaluation of the health aspects of salt (sodium chloride) as a food ingredient. This substance is on the list of food ingredients "generally recognized as safe" (GRAS). The evaluation has been made by the Select Committee on GRAS Substances of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), an independent group of scientists that has been evaluating the 450 GRAS substances under an FDA contract.

A summary of the panel's evaluation follows:

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Sodium chloride is an essential part of the diet and is present in many foods. However, it is not possible, on the basis of currently available data, to recommend a level of intake of sodium chloride that could be considered optimal for health.

The amount of salt consumed from processed foods, added to that naturally present in foods, may be sufficient to contribute to the development of hypertension in genetically susceptible individuals. Available data suggest that 10 to 30 percent of the U.S. population is genetically predisposed to hypertension and, therefore is exposed to a higher risk by ingestion of sodium chloride at current levels. Because of increasing use of processed foods in the diet, individuals who prefer to restrict salt intake find it difficult.

We should add that there are many factors, both inherited and acquired, which are thought to play roles in the development of hypertension. The evidence that salt consumption, as normally practiced, is a major factor in causing this disease is not conclusive.

The committee's report concludes that it is the prevalent judgment of the scientific community that the consumption of salt should be lowered in the United States. The Select Committee agrees, and favors development of guidelines for restricting the amount of salt in processed foods, a major contributor of dietary sodium. Adequate labeling of the sodium content of foods would help meet these objectives.

Apart from these considerations, the Committee concluded that salt has not been demonstrated to be harmful for at least 70 percent of the population at present levels of use.

I hope this is helpful.

Sincerely,

Julia Rosenberg
Consumer Communications
Office of Consumer Affairs

cc: HFE-88 Subject/Reading, HFA-305✓
App: LAG