

Does the FDA Think Potato Chips are Healthier than Cherries and Walnuts?

It was just an offhanded comment from a Hill staffer. “We generally trust the FDA,” she said. “Why shouldn’t we?”

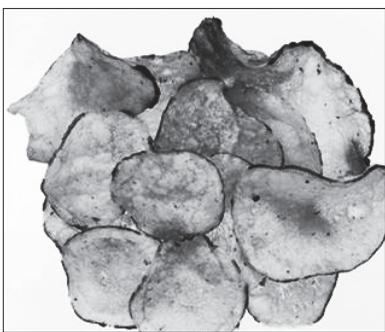
Well, for one thing, the FDA seems to have decided that walnuts are drugs.

In the latest volley in the US Food and Drug Administration’s bizarre war on healthy foods and scientific freedom of speech, the FDA has sent a Warning Letter to the CEO of a walnut cooperative complaining that the firm’s marketing of shelled walnuts is turning the nuts into illegal drugs.

Why? Because the firm dared to list some of the health benefits of walnuts on its website! Nor is this an isolated case. The FDA has taken similar legal action against cherry growers, green tea and pomegranate juice producers, and other healthy food producers. In each case, the FDA has claimed that citing good science from prestigious universities has converted these super health foods into unapproved and therefore illegal drugs.

What is the penalty for selling illegal drugs? Seizure, fines, and jail.

Has the FDA lost its mind? Isn’t the stated mission of the FDA to educate the public and improve the public health? Shouldn’t the Agency be encouraging Americans to eat more cherries and walnuts, not threatening their producers for citing valid science?



Potato Chips . . . as Health Food?

You might think that deep fried snack foods are not especially good for you, but the FDA apparently has no problem allowing the website of Frito-Lay—the snack food giant with \$12 billion in annual sales—to state the following:

Frito-Lay snacks start with real farm-grown ingredients. You might be surprised at how much good stuff goes into your favorite snack. Good stuff like potatoes, which naturally contain vitamin C and essential minerals. Or corn, one of the world’s most popular grains, packed with Thiamin, vitamin B6, and Phosphorous—all necessary for healthy bones, teeth, nerves and muscles.

And it’s not just the obvious ingredients. Our all-natural sunflower, corn and soybean oils contain good polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, which help lower total and LDL “bad” cholesterol and maintain HDL “good” cholesterol levels, which can support a healthy heart. Even salt, when eaten in moderation as part of a balanced diet, is essential for the body.

In other words, Frito-Lay is allowed to make health claims about its processed fried foods, with no repercussions whatsoever, but walnut produc-



ers can’t make similar claims about shelled walnuts, a health superfood. All of this just defies common sense.

Unlike snack foods, there is real scientific research supporting the health benefits of walnuts (as well as cherries and green tea and many other healthy foods).

What Does the Science Say?

The National Library of Medicine database contains no fewer than thirty-five peer-reviewed published papers supporting a claim that eating walnuts improves vascular health and may reduce heart attack risk. Those peer-reviewed studies have determined the following:

- There is a sharply reduced incidence of heart disease in those who consume walnuts.
- Walnuts provide a unique blend of polyunsaturated fatty acids (including omega-3s), along with nutrients like gamma tocopherol that have demonstrated heart health benefits.
- Even moderate consumption of walnuts offers significant reductions in dangerous LDL cholesterol and improvement in the lipoprotein profile.
- Walnuts protect against coronary artery disease and atherosclerosis because they contain key nutrients like arginine, polyphenols, and omega-3 fatty acids.

The scientific evidence is straightforward, unambiguous, uncontested, and in no way misleading. Yet the FDA—the federal agency responsible for protecting the health of the American public—says the walnuts “are not generally recognized as safe and effective,” and that the manufacturer’s “unauthorized health claims” have caused the walnuts to become “misbranded,” which makes them subject to government “seizure or injunction”!

For the FDA to allow Frito-Lay to pretend there are heart benefits to eating their high-calorie snack products, while censoring the ability of nut cooperatives and cherry growers to make scientifically substantiated claims, is nothing short of an outrage.

The US Food and Drug Administration is in desperate need of reform. Congress should take immediate steps to stop the harassment of healthy food producers and the censoring of good science. Americans need access to good science in order to make informed decisions about what they eat.

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