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ANH-USA to Kennedy: End "Secret GRAS" With Radical Transparency

ALEXANDRIA, VA., Feb. 17, 2026 — In response to the Feb. 15 "60 Minutes" segment on ultra-processed foods and the "self-affirmed GRAS" pathway, ANH-USA today urged policymakers to pursue major GRAS reform centered on risk prioritization and radical transparency—while warning against proposals that would effectively force the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to pre-review every GRAS determination, an approach that would be unworkable and could unintentionally restrict access to many beneficial, low-risk ingredients.

ANH-USA agrees with the core public health concern expressed on "60 Minutes" by former FDA Commissioner David Kessler and HHS Secretary Kennedy over ultra-processed foods (UPFs). ANH-USA challenges the view, however, that the over-consumption of UPFs by many Americans is directly linked to GRAS which considers the safety of individual ingredients, not their combinations as found in UPFs.

"It is now evident that rising exposure and addiction to the specific combinations of industrially modified food ingredients, and increasing amounts of synthetic and bioengineered substances, are contributing to worsening metabolic health outcomes in the United States," said Rob Verkerk, PhD, Executive and Scientific Director of ANH-USA. "It is also clear," continued Verkerk, "that some of these problematic substances have found their way into the food system through the 'self-affirmed GRAS' pathway—behind closed doors with neither FDA nor external scrutiny. Not only that, a range of harmful additives, like titanium dioxide, Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, sodium benzoate, and brominated vegetable oil (BVO), were formally approved as GRAS by the FDA."

ANH-USA emphasized *how* GRAS is reformed will determine whether the result will be a meaningful safety improvement—or a regulatory pile-up that increases harm to consumers and entrenches the largest market players.

"We fully support the need for GRAS reform—especially reform that ends *secret GRAS* and forces disclosure of the science related to ingredients for which there is evidence of harm, such as some used in UPFs," said Jonathan Emord, General Counsel for ANH-USA. "But if reform is reduced to 'FDA must pre-approve everything,' it will create a massive regulatory bottleneck and block access to countless low-risk health enhancing ingredients commonly used in health foods, including functional foods, supplements, and medical

foods. The answer is not to freeze the marketplace—it's to reveal the evidence of harm and focus in on precisely those products containing harmful ingredients."

The EU comparison is often misleading

ANH-USA also cautioned against oversimplified comparisons between the United States and European Union—including claims that Europe has "only a few hundred additives" while the U.S. has "thousands" of GRAS ingredients. In Europe, "food additives" are largely defined as technological additives governed under a specific authorization framework, while many other ingredients are regulated under general food law, with primary responsibility on the food business operator to ensure safety. "Those headline numbers are not a like-for-like comparison," Dr. Verkerk said. "They're often apples-to-oranges."

ANH-USA's blueprint: risk-tiering, transparency, and independent review

ANH-USA's GRAS reform blueprint, published in April 2025, calls for a system that is workable, enforceable, and fully aligned with Secretary Kennedy's radical transparency and Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) agendas:

- **End "secret GRAS."** Require public disclosure of all GRAS determinations and the underlying safety rationale—no more hidden dossiers.
- Create a **searchable public registry** of GRAS determinations, including conditions of use and exposure assumptions.
- Apply **risk-tiering** so scrutiny and enforcement are prioritized on higher-risk substances—especially truly novel, synthetic, and bioengineered ingredients—rather than treating every ingredient the same.
- Strengthen **conflict-of-interest safeguards** and require clear documentation of expert qualifications and decision processes.
- Enable meaningful **third-party scientific review** so independent academics and other experts can evaluate the evidence and challenge weak determinations.
- Add **rapid post-market triggers** so ingredients with emerging safety signals can be removed quickly—without waiting years for bureaucratic backlogs.

"Secrecy is the enemy of safety," continued Emord. "When companies can label a substance 'generally recognized as safe' while keeping the supporting science out of public view, consumers lose accountability, independent experts lose the ability to scrutinize the substance, and regulators are forced into reactive enforcement after harm occurs. A lawful, workable reform agenda is one that requires disclosure, focuses on documented risk, and enables independent review—not one that manufactures an insurmountable regulatory bottleneck and treats safely consumed ingredients the same as harmful ones."

Don’t confuse ingredient safety with ultra-processed food harms

ANH-USA noted that many real-world harms associated with ultra-processed foods are driven by dietary patterns and combinations—not a single ingredient evaluated in isolation. A science-based reform should therefore focus on transparent ingredient review and policies that improve consumer information and accountability at the point of choice.

“Americans need real protection from harmful ingredients—and they also need continued access to beneficial ones,” Dr. Verkerk concluded. “We can do both by ending secret GRAS and replacing it with radical transparency and risk-based oversight. In short: don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater.”

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EDITORS’ NOTES

ANH-USA GRAS White Paper (April 2025): https://anh-usa.org/anhs-gras-reform-white-paper-gains-national-momentum-and-media-attention/

60 Minutes segment with Secretary Kennedy and former FDA Commissioner David Kessler, February 15, 2026: https://youtu.be/LHO-TrjKJtI?si=cVo5hS3oEwl9J8I_

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