

## **Sugar is Sugar**

*By Tracy Taylor Grondine*

This month the Corn Refiners Association (CRA) petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to allow food and beverage makers to call High Fructose Corn Syrup, or HFCS, simply “corn sugar.” And why shouldn’t they? HFCS has certainly—and undeservingly—received a bad rap over the past several years. It’s the bogeyman of the sugar world.

While HFCS is a natural ingredient, which the body handles the same as table sugar, critics have still waged an all-out war on the product, in turn providing misinformation to consumers. For example, says CRA, despite the fact that HFCS and table sugar contain the same amount of fructose, nearly 58 percent of consumers believe the corn-based sweetener contains more fructose. Further, research shows that labeling products with “HFCS” is confusing to consumers.

But, says CRA, sugar is sugar.

According to a 2008 report, the American Dietetic Association validated that HFCS is “nutritionally equivalent to sucrose (table sugar),” containing the same amount of calories and “once absorbed into the bloodstream, the two sweeteners are indistinguishable.”

So why is HFCS the scapegoat for America’s health and obesity problems? That question goes all the way back to the farm bill. Critics claim that farm subsidies to corn producers are adding inches to America’s waistline. Opponents have zoned in on HFCS as a means to discredit the farm bill. Adding to that is the natural food movement, whereby food manufacturers are trying to remain relevant during the growing trend by cutting HFCS and labeling their products as “HFCS-free.”

In a recent editorial in *the Atlantic*, James McWilliams, a professor at Texas State University, goes further to blame food writers “who have set out to deem HFCS the sole harbinger of civilization’s decline into epidemical obesity.” McWilliams writes “while I cannot prove it, my strong sense is that food writers are allowing their smoldering disdain for industrial food to undermine the cool-headedness required to accurately report scientific information relevant to it.”

So, the name “corn sugar” is now in the hands of the U.S. government, which could take up to two years to make it official. In the meantime, it’s up to farmers and consumers, who stand to lose the taste of some of their favorite products made with HFCS, to educate consumers. Sugar is sugar. And just like table sugar, HFCS is safe in moderation (and especially good in that occasional Twinkie).