

Cornfed America: Politics, Economics and Your Health

Have you noticed that high fructose corn syrup seems to be replacing sugar on the labels of most soft-drinks and snack foods? By the 1980's thousands of new sweetened snack foods and cheap, super-sized soft-drinks hit the market and the amount of fructose drastically increased in the American diet. It is no coincidence that cases of obesity and Type 2 diabetes escalated significantly at that time.

According to Katherine Flegal, an epidemiologist at the National Center for Health Statistics, the percentage of obese Americans stayed relatively constant through the 1960's and 1970's at 13 percent to 14 percent and then shot up by 8 percentage points in the 1980's. By the end of that decade, nearly one in four Americans was obese. That steep rise, which is consistent through all segments of American society, continued unabated through the 1990's. Meanwhile, overweight children nearly tripled in number. And for the first time, physicians began diagnosing Type 2 diabetes in adolescents. Type 2 diabetes often accompanies obesity. It used to be called adult-onset diabetes and now, for the obvious reason, is not.

Up to the mid 1970s, sucrose was the primary sugar consumed by Americans. That changed when manufacturers discovered a cheaper source of refined sugar: corn. A process was evolved that could change the natural fructose in corn to glucose, and then by adding synthetic chemicals, change the glucose back into an artificial, synthetic type of fructose called high fructose. (Freeston)

High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) became big real fast. In 1984, Coke and Pepsi changed from cane sugar to. Nearly 10 percent of the calories consumed by adult Americans and 20 percent of calories consumed by children come from corn sweeteners. Today HFCS is the preferred sweetener in most soft drinks and processed foods. Read the labels. As of 1997, worldwide production of HFCS exceeded 8 billion kilograms. (Freeston)

Preliminary research suggests that high fructose corn syrup is metabolized differently than other sugars, making it potentially harmful. Remember, natural fructose is contained in most raw fruits and vegetables. It is a natural food. Moderate amounts of natural fructose can be easily digested by the body with no stress or depleting of mineral stores. Natural fructose does not cause roller coaster blood sugar, unless the person overdoes it. Natural fructose is not addicting.

High fructose corn syrup, by contrast, cannot be well digested, actually inhibits digestion, is addicting, and causes a great number of biochemical errors. HFCS is artificial; a non-food.

So, why has corn syrup become so popular? Corn is the most widely planted cereal crop in the world, especially in North America. Take into account the \$190 billion farm bill,

that President Bush signed last June, 2002; this might reflect whose interests are really being served. The bill provides a 10-year program, where taxpayers will pay farmers \$4 billion a year to grow more corn, regardless of the fact that we struggle get rid of the surplus that already exists.

In a July 2002, New York Times article, author Micheal Pollan describes the political/economic agenda:

The average bushel of corn (56 pounds) sells for about \$2 today; it costs farmers more than \$3 to grow it. But rather than design a program that would encourage farmers to plant less corn - which would have the benefit of lifting the price farmers receive for it - Congress has decided instead to subsidize corn by the bushel, thereby insuring that the zea mays (botanical name for corn) dominion over its 125,000-square mile American habitat will go unchallenged.

At first blush this subsidy might look like a handout for farmers, but really it's a form of welfare for the plant itself - and for all those economic interests that profit from its overproduction: the processors, factory farms, and the soft drink and snack makers that rely on cheap corn. For zea mays has triumphed by making itself indispensable not to farmers (whom it is swiftly and surely bankrupting) but to the Archer Daniels Midlands, Tysons and Coca-Colas of the world.

There is no doubt that in our capitalistic society the health and well-being of the people often takes a backseat to the political and economic engine that drives our world. For more information on your health and how you can protect it, visit our website at www.center4naturalhealth.com.

Freeston N--- Production of high fructose corn syrup, Chemistry & Industry Highlights 3 Mar 1997, Nene College, Northhampton