

< Jones

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SODA COMPANY SWITCHES TO SUGAR

CEO says sentiment of customers to rule in sweetener debate

entists, doctors and food companies say sugar is healthier and more natural, while others say there's little or no difference."

"I don't care what researchers say anymore," van Stolk said. "They told me 10 years ago not to worry about global warming."

The first attacks came shortly after Jones announced the sweetener switch last fall.

A Pepsi spokesman told The Wall Street Journal that Jones' claim that pure cane sugar is more healthful "just isn't true. Marketing a myth for a competitive advantage is irresponsible and short-sighted." Then Jones got a letter from the Corn Refiners Association, which doesn't like Jones' claims about sweeteners, either.

Several scientists weighed in, saying there is no evidence that high-fructose corn syrup, or HFCS, is worse than sugar.

Van Stolk doesn't much care who's right. He just wants hap-



TOM REESE / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Jones Soda is switching to "Pure Cane Soda" after years of discussion and one employee's e-mail call to action.

py customers. For years, Jones customers have asked the company to use sugar instead of high-fructose corn syrup, he said, and not one of them has complained about the switch.

They want sugar, he said, "because it tastes better and they feel better about it because it's pure; it's sugar. They know what it is."

His defense has become a common refrain for food companies that want to make ingredient changes without becoming embroiled in the confusing world of nutritional rights and wrongs.

Starbucks played the "customers want it" card recently when it announced it has stopped using milk with artifi-

cial growth hormone in some markets.

The first "Jones Pure Cane Soda" shipment went out last month, and by April everything but the company's energy drinks will have cane sugar. Energy drinks like Whoop Ass will switch by fall.

In its usual irreverent style, Jones is accompanying the rollout with an advertising campaign that recommends people drink less soda, van Stolk said, before tossing off a couple catchphrases: "Soda's a treat, not a food group" and, alluding to ethanol, "Corn is for cars."

He elaborates: "It's an indulgence, and you should indulge in moderation."

Van Stolk has no illusions