

about proving anything to competitors like Pepsi or Coca-Cola. "I'm not in their league," he said. "They spill more than we sell."

But he laughs when he hears that Pepsi is considering making a cola with cane sugar and has started rotating its label designs, something Jones has done for years.

Other soda companies may not follow van Stolk in recommending that customers drink their products in moderation. But Barry Popkin, a nutrition professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, praises Jones for doing it.

However, he doesn't like Jones, or anyone, suggesting that sugar is better than HFCS. One of the first researchers to say there might be a link between HFCS and obesity, Popkin says there is no evidence to support his earlier speculation.

It discourages him that so many people, particularly on the Internet, continue to make the claim.

Well-known experts like Dr. Mehmet Oz, director of the Cardiovascular Institute at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, says on Oprah Winfrey's Web site that HFCS alters the body's ability to regulate appetite. Popkin's response: "I can find a doctor who will say anything. That's not research."

Much research into HFCS is

funded by industry sources. The Corn Refiners Association and the American Beverage Institute funded a University of Washington study that found no significant difference in the feeling of fullness people get from drinking sodas sweetened with cane sugar versus HFCS.

Professor Adam Drewnowski, who led that study, says the university has rules to ensure research is not compromised by its funding and that funders can't block publication of results they don't like.

Audra Erickson, president of the Corn Refiners Association, declined to comment on the letter its law firm sent to Jones Soda.

She blames HFCS's bad pub-

licity partly on a desire to find reasons for the country's obesity problem, "as if an increase in calories and a lack of physical exercise were not to blame."

Van Stolk, meanwhile, credits Jones' receptionist, Jason Kim, with pushing the company to use pure cane sugar. It costs about 5 percent more than HFCS, which will lead to a slight price increase on Jones products, but executives had been talking about making the switch for years.

An e-mail last summer from Kim moved van Stolk to act.

"He was so eloquent in what he wrote," van Stolk said. "He was just like, 'Dude, do it.'"

Melissa Allison: 206-464-3312 or mallison@seattletimes.com

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