

Touting Health, a Soda Maker Switches to Sugar

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Public Health in Chapel Hill and an author of a 2004 paper in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition that proposed the link between obesity and HFCS.

HFCS is manufactured from corn, while sugar is a natural substance found most commonly in sugar cane and sugar beets. Manufacturers of HFCS steep and separate corn kernels, break the corn starch down to glucose, then add enzymes that convert the glucose to fructose, according to the Corn Refiners Association. They then blend the fructose with glucose to create HFCS.

Cane sugar is made by grinding and pressing sugar cane to extract its juice,

boiling it until it crystallizes, drying it to produce raw sugar and then refining—or washing and filtering it—to remove plant materials and color.

Nonetheless, a growing body of evidence finds little difference between high-fructose corn syrup and table sugar. In one study, Peter J. Havel, a research endocrinologist in the Department of Nutrition at the University of California, Davis, and colleagues found no difference in the way HFCS and sucrose regulate the hormones that control body weight. “Both of them can potentially contribute to weight gain,” he says.

Both HFCS and sugar were also found to increase triglyceride levels, a risk fac-

tor for cardiovascular disease, he says. The researchers publicized their findings at a scientific meeting in Boston in October and are writing them up to submit them to a journal for publication. The study was funded by PepsiCo Inc.

Evidence suggesting little difference between the sweeteners isn’t stopping Mr. van Stolk from using sugar as a marketing tool. The Jones Soda CEO says that regardless of what the science shows, consumers are demanding products without HFCS. Indeed, 38% of adults surveyed for a Morgan Stanley report last month said they were actively trying to actively reduce or limit their consumption of HFCS.

Drinks made with cane sugar also taste better than those made with HFCS, Mr. van Stolk contends. “Everyone has a different report that says something else,” he adds. “I’m just listening to what consumers say.” Jones will make the change to its entire line of sodas, teas and energy drinks by April 2007, he says.

HFCS experts dispute the notion that drinks made with sugar taste “better,” though they acknowledge that there can sometimes be a slight taste difference because the sweetness in HFCS is perceived by the taste buds earlier than the sweetness in table sugar. But they also note that sugar breaks down quickly in soda, ending up

with a composition similar to HFCS.

Some other upstart beverage companies already make their sodas, teas and other drinks with natural sugar rather than HFCS, in part to improve their odds of getting on the shelves of natural-foods

retailers, the company uses a crystalline fructose, which is so sweet that not as much of it has to be used, keeping calories down, according to Carol Dollard, the company’s chief operating officer. The sweetener also appeals to Glaceau because it is pure and all natural, she says.

Coca-Cola Co. and PepsiCo have used HFCS widely in their sodas in the U.S. for more than 20 years and vigorously defend its safety. “To say cane sugar is healthier than HFCS just isn’t true. Marketing a myth for a competitive advantage is irresponsible and shortsighted,” says Dave DeCecco, a Pepsi spokesman.

Still, Pepsi is considering marketing “natural” versions of its Sierra Mist soda and possibly other products, Beverage Digest, an industry publication, reported recently. Among those

other products could be a version of Pepsi-Cola made with cane sugar and devoid of the preservatives and other ingredients that health-food-oriented consumers shun, according to a person familiar with the company’s discussions.



A soda fridge pack from Jones Soda Co., which plans to replace high fructose corn syrup in its drinks with sugar

retailers like Whole Foods Market Inc., which sells only a few products, such as energy bars, that contain HFCS, according to a company spokeswoman. Glaceau, makers of Vitaminwater and Fruitwater, doesn’t use HFCS in any of its products.