

Regulators say Frosties are not healthy

Kellogg's has been told by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to withdraw advertising implying that Frosties cereal is healthy. In its adjudication, the ASA said that because Frosties had a high sugar content, they concluded that 'the implication was misleading'.

The Food Commission believes that this landmark ruling has significant implications for the regulation of food advertising in the UK. Firstly, the ASA has acknowledged that an individual product can be classified as 'high' in a particular ingredient, such as sugar. And secondly, that associating a healthy eating message with a high-sugar product is inappropriate – especially where that product is targeted at children, who do not have the nutritional knowledge to unpick and interpret such messages.

The cinema advertisement for Kellogg's Frosties cereals showed boys playing football, with the slogan 'train hard, eat right and earn your stripes'.

The ASA ruled that the claim 'eat right' misleadingly implied that Frosties are healthy when the product is in fact 40% sugar, or 12g per 30g serving. Kellogg's was told not to include the claim in future adverts for Frosties.

The company defended the product's nutritional value, saying it was high in simple and complex carbohydrates, and low in fat. Of

course, high in simple carbohydrates means high in sugar.

What could the ASA ruling on Kellogg's Frosties mean for other food companies marketing their high-sugar and high-fat products using healthy-sounding descriptions? See box below.

Tony the Tiger hires a PR firm

This is not the first time sugar information has been manipulated to give a Kellogg's product a healthier image.

When Kellogg's launched new Reduced Sugar Frosties in August, the press release for the launch described the product as a healthier alternative to eating a banana – stating that a banana contains 21g of sugar.

The Food Commission quickly wrote to Hill & Knowlton, the PR company hired to promote the new product, expressing our concern that they were circulating misleading nutritional information – pointing out that the sugars in a banana are not an appropriate comparison. After all, health concerns about sugar consumption relate to extrinsic sugars such as those found in Frosties, not to the intrinsic sugars contained in the cells of fruit.

Our concern was met with a stony silence. But why should Hill & Knowlton know or care about such nutritional details? Because they describe themselves as expert advisors to the



Comparing the sugar content of Reduced Sugar Frosties with bananas is, to put it bluntly, bananas.

food industry on European food law, food safety, consumer protection, food labelling, advertising and sales promotion and corporate and social responsibility. No doubt for a fat fee, Hill & Knowlton says it can provide the following service for companies such as its current clients – the European Breakfast Cereals Association, Benecol, Kellogg's, Novartis and Proctor & Gamble:

- Provide strategic advice on how to reach political and regulatory objectives
- Ensure control and cost-effectiveness for any lobbying campaign by early involvement in the decision-making process
- Cover all the European institutions and all stages of the legislative process
- Identify pressure points and key players in the process by analysing the political, economic and social aspects of an issue
- Provide tailored lobbying strategies with and/or on behalf of the client
- Assist the client in the preparation of position papers
- Set up contact programmes with key decision-makers

Surely this portfolio ought to stop Hill & Knowlton undermining the five-a-day message by painting fruit in an unfavourable light?

We also wonder if the very launch of Reduced Sugar Frosties was another clever bit of spin. We have yet to see any of this product on sale. Reduced Sugar Frosties were launched at a time when food companies were under fire in the media for the fat and sugar content of many products targeted at children. Kellogg's stock response was to say that the reduced sugar variety offered greater choice. A quick survey by the Food Commission revealed that, in supermarkets offering online grocery shopping, only Tesco offers the reduced sugar variety. Sainsbury's, Asda and Waitrose do not.

New products require considerable promotion to ensure that they are seen and tried. It is no good saying that a company offers choice if the products are not available for consumers to choose.

Testing the test case

Sugar Puffs are nearly half sugar (49%) – five times as much sugar as the Food Standards Agency classifies as 'a lot' (10%). This breakfast cereal is marketed to children with free toys and collectables. In the light of their ruling that Frosties should not be marketed with the phrase 'eat right' due to its high sugar content, what would the ASA now say about Quaker describing Sugar Puffs as 'nutritious'?

Real Fruit Winders are described by Kellogg's on its vending website (www.kelloggsfoodservice.co.uk) as 'healthy confectionery' and 'the healthy treat mums have been waiting for'. Even if the 30% sugars in this product are largely from fruit, they are extrinsic sugars – the type that can damage teeth. Following the Frosties ruling, what would the ASA now have to say about this product being described as 'healthy'?

And what about all the other products marketed with healthy-sounding descriptions, but which contain high levels of fat, salt or sugar? The Advertising Standards Authority ruling on Frosties cereal could set a precedent. If it does, this will be a real opportunity to stop food companies associating healthy properties with fatty, sugary or salty foods – something that consumer groups such as the Food Commission have called for for years.

If you see advertisements in print, on television or at the cinema that focus on healthy-sounding properties – especially if the advertisement is aimed at children – please let us know. Tell us what the advert said, where it appeared and when (and send us a copy, if you can). If we think it is a good case, the Food Commission will submit a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority on your behalf.