Substances in Food and Labeling; Regulatory Framework for Foods that Companies are Marketing as “Functional Foods”

Public Hearing Before U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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Question 4: IFT Recommendation to Establish GRAS Review Panels is Unlawful and Unnecessary

- “Functional foods” is a popular term for products already regulated by statute.
- Safety and efficacy issues are addressed by FDCA provisions for:
  -- Food Additives
  -- Health Claims
  -- Structure/Function Claims
  -- Drugs
  -- Misbranding.
FDA Has Sole Authority to Determine Appropriateness of Ingredients and Claims

• Food Additive petitions must be approved by FDA.

• Health Claims must be authorized by FDA.
FDCA Specifies When Outside Experts Can be Used for Health and Nutrient Content Claims

• FDAMA – permits manufacturers to rely on “authoritative statements” from expert governmental bodies as support for proposed claims.

• FDA ultimately decides whether to rely on “authoritative statement” as the basis for approving a claim.
The Law Permits FDA to Consider Recommendations of Advisory Committees

- FDA is permitted to create advisory committees.
- FDA routinely considers the recommendations of advisory committees when approving drugs.
- FDA already has a Food Advisory Committee.
- NAS-DESI review of efficacy.
Question 6: IFT’s Recommendation That Economic Incentives are Needed to Promote R & D for Functional Foods Ignores Existing Incentives

- Rising Sales – Sales of functional foods have increased from $16.2 billion in 1999 to $24.3 billion in 2004 – a 50% increase – *without economic incentives.*

Source: *Nutrition Business Journal*
Technological Advances

• The improved ability of food processors to mask the unpleasant tastes of ingredients such as Omega-3 fatty acids from fish oils demonstrates that strong incentives already exist to develop such products.
Exclusivity Contrary to Statute

• None of the other statutory food safety and labeling approval measures provide exclusivity to the petitioner: food additive regulations, health claims or nutrient content claims.

• There is no scarcity in the marketplace of products bearing health claims, nutrient content claims or structure/function claims.
Government Funding for Research Needs to be Increased

• Contracts should be awarded to NIH to research the safety and efficacy of the most widely used ingredients.
Question 7: Enforcement Efforts Are Inadequate

- Food labeling is only reviewed as part of a risk-based safety inspection, once every five years.

- FDA is making some progress against illegal claims on the web – e.g., in one effort, FDA sent warning letters to 29 cherry juice companies with products claiming to treat or prevent cancer, heart disease or arthritis.
Increased Enforcement Essential

• We located warning letters for only five functional food companies that were issued as a result of plant inspections or review of product labels.

• Illegal nutrient content claims abound where a qualified health claim has been authorized, e.g., omega-3 fatty acids, green tea.

• FDA should authorize health claims and nutrient content claims in tandem.
Illegal Medical Foods

• Some “functional” foods masquerade as medical foods in an attempt to escape requirements for conventional foods.

• ANPR issued in 1996 (withdrawn in 2003).

• FDA should crack down on phony medical foods.
FDA Action Needed

• Each district office should designate functional food inspector.

• Functional food inspector should conduct field examinations in supermarkets to detect questionable products.

• CFSAN should designate staffer to review web ads and popular self-help or body building publications for suspicious products.
Inspections Should Be Targeted At Functional Food Manufacturing Facilities

- Labeling is given only a cursory review during safety inspections.

- Inspectors are told not to do critical labeling reviews unless they have specific authorization.

- Inspectors are told not to look at more than 3 labels per inspection.
Enforcement Actions Should be Well Publicized

- Well publicized enforcement actions can persuade the rest of the industry to halt misleading and potentially harmful claims.