

LA TIMES EDITORIAL

## Did you expect real fruit from Life Savers?

**Snacks that falsely appear fruity may be bad for you, but they shouldn't be forced to change names.**

January 27, 2007

LONG AGO, IN a more innocent, more slender time, Juicy Fruit used to market itself as "The Gum With the Fascinating Artificial Flavor." Don't look for such truth in sloganeering today. The hidden persuaders at Wrigley now trick us into thinking that the sickly sweet gum is an important source of vitamin C, a nutritional snack to rank up there with Nesquik, Cap'n Crunch and Life Savers.

These are just a few of the health snacks that, a shocking new study from the Prevention Institute reveals, contain absolutely no fruit. In six well-illustrated pages, the institute's "Where's the Fruit? Fruit Content of the Most Highly Advertised Children's Food and Beverages" warns of the epidemic of adolescent diabetes, cites the terrifying statistic that large supermarkets "may display as many as 40,000 products" and mines a recent report on heavily advertised kids' foods from the Kaiser Family Foundation (you may know the foundation from its frequent, and frequently hilarious, studies of youth-depraving media).

"Where's the Fruit?" looks at 37 products that contain words or images on their packaging related to fruit, and finds that, of that total, 10 contain appreciable amounts of fruit, two contain 100% fruit juice and six contain "minimal fruit." The rest, all 19 of them, contain no fruit at all.

If these findings seem unimpressive, it's because they have been cherry-picked as part of a political campaign. *[Note: The preceding sentence contains no actual cherries.]* Larry Cohen, executive director of the institute, would have the Food and Drug Administration prevent businesses from using images of fruit or the word "fruit" in the packaging for these products, and he rejects a reasonable-person allowance for marketing language. "I would have thought, and other people would have thought, that Life Savers contained some fruit," he says.

Not all these products are easily recognized as junk. The institute deserves thanks for pointing out that Trix Strawberry Kiwi Yogurt is entirely fruit free. And a host of fruit-flavored drinks might fool an incautious shopper about their nutritional value.

Then again, drinks such as Hi-C and Kool-Aid have never pretended to be real juice. That's why kids the world over refer to them collectively as "bug juice" rather than just "juice."

This is not to make light of juvenile obesity or the challenges of giving your family a balanced diet. But many of us look to a world of everexpanding consumer choices and see a glass that is fruit-flavored, berrylicious and at least half-full.

PREVENTION INSTITUTE RESPONSE

### Dear editors:

Unlike your 1/27 editorial suggested, our "Where's the Fruit" study revealing that most heavily marketed kids foods saying 'fruit' have little fruit and the majority no fruit at all, was conducted scientifically as opposed to being politically motivated. In fact, my conclusion that we need to regulate labels so that parents and kids aren't deceived by them came *after* reviewing the Study's findings. I was shocked. We can't have fruit in large letters on the front, but no fruit if you read the small print on the side. The researchers systematically examined every product aggressively marketed to kids that has fruit on the label. The bottom line is, with health care risks and costs rising precipitously, food businesses as well as parents have to take honest responsibility. We all know what fruit is, and when it says fruit, it should mean fruit. Readers can see for themselves at <http://www.preventioninstitute.org>.

SACRAMENTO BEE

## **Editorial: Want fruit for kids? Go to the produce aisle**

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Don't be fooled by the picture of the luscious strawberries on that Yoplait Go-Gurt (Strawberry Splash) carton. It contains no strawberries. Neither does Yogurt Dannon Danimals XL Strawberry Explosion or Nestle Nesquick Strawberry Milk. You won't find berries in Berry Berry Kix or fruit in Post Fruity Pebbles either.

Strategic Alliance Promoting Healthy Foods & Activity Environments, a nonprofit advocacy group, just released "Where's the Fruit," a nutritional analysis of 37 of the most heavily advertised children's foods. Their findings ought to alarm parents and embarrass the food industry.

Despite the words "fruit" and "fruity" in their names or pictures of berries, oranges, apples and other fruits on packages, 51 percent of the foods analyzed, 19 of the 37, had no fruit in them. Another 16 percent, six of the those analyzed, contained only minimal amounts, in the form of 2 percent to 10 percent juice.

Leslie Mikkelsen, a registered dietitian and a lead author of the study says, "Parents drawn to products that seem healthier for their children based on references to fruit on the packaging are being deceived." Deception about the fruit content is only part of the problem.

The nutritional analysis also found extraordinarily high amounts of added sugar, usually high-fructose corn syrup, in many of the products. High-fructose corn syrup has been identified by nutritionists as a leading culprit in the nation's epidemic of childhood obesity and diabetes.

Food manufacturers ought to be more honest about food, but parents need to be more skeptical about suspiciously sweet-tasting snacks that come out of a box. If you want your children to eat fruit, go to the produce aisle and pick up an orange, an apple or a banana.