

Industry backs off food labels after FDA criticism

October 24 2009, By SARAH SKIDMORE , AP Food Industry Writer



FILE - In this Oct. 20, 2009 file photo, a box of Kellogg's Pops breakfast cereal with a "Smart Choices" green check printed on its front is shown in San Francisco. A food labeling program created by U.S. manufacturers is being voluntarily halted after federal regulators said it could be misleading to consumers.(AP Photo/Russel A. Daniels, file)

(AP) -- A food industry group is voluntarily halting promotion of its nutrition labeling program after federal regulators said such systems may be misleading consumers, officials with the group said Friday.

Industry leaders launched the "Smart Choices" program in August to identify foods that meet certain nutritional standards and then highlight them for consumers with a green label on package fronts.

But the [Food and Drug Administration](#) said Tuesday that there are so many labeling programs with different criteria that they may mislead consumers about the health benefits of certain foods. The agency told manufacturers it will crack down on inaccurate labeling, although it did not name specific products or give a timeline for enforcement.

Food makers, grocers, health organizations and others have created an array of voluntary nutrition labeling programs recently to draw consumers interested in more healthful foods.

Smart Choices, which includes nine major companies such as Kellogg Co., Kraft Foods Inc. and General Mills Inc., has been criticized for handing its green seal to processed foods that are high in sugar, such as Froot Loops cereal and Cracker Jack snack food.

Officials with Smart Choices in Washington, D.C., said Friday that the group will "postpone" active operations and not encourage wider use of the logo while the FDA investigates labeling issues.

Smart Choices stood behind its nutritional criteria, saying the program's criteria are based on federal dietary guidelines and its efforts are a step in the right direction. Board member Richard Kahn said the group supports the FDA's effort.

"The impetus for the Smart Choices program was that there were and are too many systems," he said. "We applaud the concept of having one system nationwide."

He noted the group informed the FDA about Smart Choices during all stages of its development.

Manufacturers that currently use the logo can continue to do so, Kahn said.

Kraft said it would not change the labeling on products now on store shelves but did not say how it will proceed.

Kellogg said it will phase out "Smart Choices" labeling on its products.

The FDA said it is working to define the criteria manufacturers must meet to make certain nutrition claims on product fronts. The agency plans to work with manufacturers, nutritionists and others to design a standardized system to help consumers select healthy foods.

"Helping consumers make better, healthier choices for themselves is a critical part of the FDA's public health mission," the agency said in a statement Friday. "Consumers want and have a right to clear, accessible nutrition information that they can trust to help guide their [food](#) choices."

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