

Decision to remove artificial ingredients a challenge, says researcher

June 25 2015, by Lester Wilson



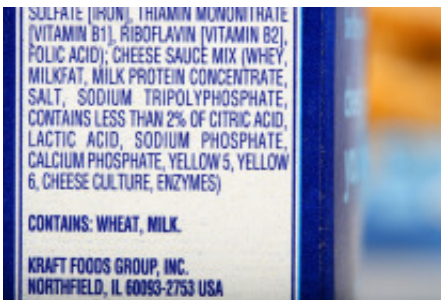
General Mills and Kraft both plan to remove artificial ingredients, such as color and flavor, from their products. Credit: Christopher Gannon

Several major food companies have announced plans to remove artificial ingredients, such as color and flavor, from their products within the next few years. It's a move driven by consumer demand and one that will be a challenge for the industry, says Lester Wilson, University Professor of Food Science and Human Nutrition at Iowa State University.

"The industry is going to react to what consumers want, because we vote with our pocketbook," Wilson said. "The challenge for these companies as they switch from artificial colors is trying to find the right natural pigments that fit and withstand the process for making those products."

For example, artificial colors are more heat stable and hold their color longer. Natural pigments are more sensitive to environmental conditions, such as heat, acid and oxygen levels or light, Wilson said. The switch may change the flavor, taste, color or texture of the product, as well as the price.

Natural ingredients are often more expensive. Wilson says just look at the price difference for vanilla ice cream made with vanilla extract, compared to the artificial ingredient vanillin, which is much cheaper. Not only is there a difference in cost, but vanilla extract's flavor is not as strong, he said. This is just an example of the factors that companies must address in making this move. It also explains why the change won't happen overnight.



"It's going to take time for some of these companies to find all of the replacement ingredients that fit," Wilson said. "In doing this, companies

want to be viewed as good citizens. They want to provide a healthy product, something that tastes good and something that they can make a profit with so the [company](#) survives. They're juggling a lot of different components in this issue."

Push for a clean label

Companies such as General Mills and Kraft are making the change in response to sales and consumer feedback. Wilson says consumers want a "clean label" that's easy to understand, not a lengthy list of unknown, hard-to-pronounce ingredients. It's no different than the push for antibiotic-free poultry or the Food and Drug Administration's recent ruling to remove partially hydrogenated oils from its "Generally Recognized as Safe" list.

"If consumers weren't saying we want a clean label and that we want to be able to understand everything on there, the industry would not change, unless companies felt they could make something better or less costly," Wilson said.

While many consumers may applaud the move, there is a risk for companies in making this change. If the natural [ingredients](#) dramatically change what consumers like most about the product, they'll stop buying it, Wilson said.

"If a brand name is the gold standard leader and they start messing with it, often that can create problems, unless their product development people are really good and can keep the same color, taste, texture, viscosity, whatever the sensory characteristics are for the consumer."

Wilson says time and sales will determine how companies respond if [consumers](#) don't like the new, [natural ingredients](#). Similar to [soft drink companies](#) that have introduced new recipes, they may revert back to

what is most popular, he said.

Provided by Iowa State University

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