

# University reviewing study touting company's chocolate milk

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A study by the University of Maryland touting the benefits of a small company's chocolate milk is raising concerns about the potential conflicts-of-interest that can arise when food makers collaborate with schools on such efforts.

Late last month, the university fired off a press release declaring that a preliminary study showed that Fifth Quarter Fresh's milk helped improve the cognitive and motor functions of high school football players, even after suffering concussions. The announcement raised red flags because the details of the full study were not made available.

The focus on a specific product also seemed to underscore the problems that can arise with research involving commercial entities. Although collaborations with food and beverage makers are not unusual in the academic world, some health advocates say they come with inherent conflicts-of-interest that can contribute to public confusion about nutrition.

Now, the University of Maryland says it is launching a review into the release of the preliminary results and distancing itself from the press release.

Pat O'Shea, vice president of research at the University of Maryland, said in a phone interview Thursday that people should not rely on the results conveyed in the release, since they haven't been through the proper scientific review.

"We value our reputation and we value the advice we give to the public, and I believe this is not characteristic of what a leading, respected university should do," he said.

O'Shea said the review's goal is not to determine the validity of the study results, but why they were published without proper vetting.

The study about Fifth Quarter Fresh was funded through a university program intended to boost Maryland's economy by connecting local businesses with researchers. The Maryland Industrial Partnerships' studies are subject to the same standards as the university's other research, the school said.

As part of the program, Fifth Quarter Fresh contributed 10 percent of the funding for the \$100,000 study, or \$10,000. Bigger companies are required to provide as much as 50 percent of funding. The state provides the rest of the funding to the university for the program.

While programs bringing together industry and academia are common and do not pose an inherent problem, they should be clear about their goals, said Andrew Holtz, who wrote about the Fifth Quarter study in a post for [HealthNewsReview.org](http://HealthNewsReview.org), which evaluates health claims.

"Is the purpose to find out what's good for these athletes, or is the purpose to develop marketing materials?" Holtz said.

For instance, Holtz noted the study did not appear to compare the product with other chocolate milks.

It wasn't the first study by the university praising Fifth Quarter Fresh. This past July, another press release declared a study had found the drink outperformed competing products by 13 to 17 percent in aiding post-exercise recovery. That full study has not been published either.

Jae Kun Shim, a professor of kinesiology at the University of Maryland's School of Public Health who conducted both studies, was unavailable for an interview.

Fifth Quarter Fresh says its milk has higher amounts of protein, electrolytes, calcium and carbohydrates, and that its pasteurization process helps preserve casein proteins for longer.

Fifth Quarter donated its product to the study, which was given to three of the seven schools in the study, said Richard Doak, a dairy veterinarian and co-founder of Fifth Quarter.

He said no products were given to the other four schools in the control group, but deferred questions about the study details to Shim.

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