

Obama Administration: Sugary Foods Not So Grrreat!

by ARI SHAPIRO



Enlarge

iStockphoto.com

The Obama administration's new advertising guidelines could make Tony the Tiger and Toucan Sam endangered species.

April 28, 2011

text size **A A A**

New advertising guidelines from the Obama administration could make Dig 'Em the frog an endangered species — along with Toucan Sam, Chester Cheetah and other junk-food mascots used to sell products to children that are high in sugar, fat and sodium.

"Your ability to recognize those characters is a function of how much money the food makers spend in trying to alter the behaviors of children in a non-healthy manner," says Stephen Teret, a public health professor at Johns Hopkins University.

Now the Federal Trade Commission has offered what it calls "voluntary principles to guide industry self-regulation efforts to improve the nutritional profile of foods marketed to children."

The government wants the food industry to market healthy foods to kids — not the fast food, sugary cereals and salty snacks that make up so much of the food advertising market aimed at children today.

The program would be voluntary, but it still rankles libertarians such as David Boaz of the Cato Institute. He sees this program as a government infringement on companies' free speech rights.

"If the federal government decided to issue voluntary guidelines about what newsmen should say to avoid inflaming the public, I think [the news media] would be pretty upset," he argues.

And, he says, since food companies have deep government involvement, opting out of these voluntary standards is "very difficult to do."

Margo Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest hopes he's right. She helped draft the standards, and she says although food companies have taken steps to self-regulate, right now the system is a patchwork with lots of holes.

Government has a very big role to play if we are going to end childhood obesity within a generation, as the first lady has called on us to do.

- Scott Faber, vice president of federal affairs at the Grocery Manufacturers Association

"These standards could take us from having self-regulation be a nice idea to having self-regulation actually work," Wootan says.

The food industry says it's open to these proposals.

"Government has a very big role to play if we are going to end childhood obesity within a generation, as the first lady has called on us to do," says Scott Faber, vice president of federal affairs at the Grocery Manufacturers Association. "So these are recommendations that we'll look at carefully as we think of ways to update the standards we're already using."

Source: YouTube

The public has 45 days to comment on these new proposals before the Obama administration sends its final report to Congress.