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TODAY'S NEWS | CHRISTIAN VIEWS

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[Health](#), [News Desk](#)

Silly rabbit, Trix aren't for kids

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Associated Press/Photo by Paul Sakuma

With an abundance of choices on the cereal aisle, the government is pushing food companies to market a better breakfast. After rejecting stricter, voluntary guidelines proposed by the federal government, General Mills, ConAgra Foods, and Kellogg's say they will cut back on marketing unhealthy foods to children.

The new industry standards will allow companies to advertise food and beverage products to children that meet certain nutritional criteria. Children's cereals, for example, will be advertised if they have no more than 10 grams of sugar per serving. But the federal regulations would have discouraged advertising for cereals with more than 8 grams of sugar.

That means that General Mills could advertise Honey Nut Cheerios under the industry guidelines, but not under the government standards. Other sugary cereals such as Trix, Lucky Charms, and Count Chocula would also make the industry cut.

The government guidelines would have covered packaging and media advertising, but the industry standards only apply to media. The little bee on the front of the Honey Nut Cheerios box and the rabbit on the Trix box would stay under the industry proposal, but would have to go under the government draft.

House Republicans have included a provision in next year's Federal Trade Commission budget that would require a study of the potential cost and impact of the guidelines before implementation. If Congress does not delay the standards, a final draft could come by the end of 2011..

Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., doesn't like the government's new measures: "What's voluntary today becomes a regulation tomorrow." David Boaz of the Cato Institute told National Public Radio that the move would pose a threat to free speech: "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.”

What's often going unasked: With a trillion dollar deficit and three wars to fight, is deciding between 8 and 10 grams of sugar per serving a *grrreat* idea for the federal government?

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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