

June 25, 2002

Dr. Lester Crawford, Deputy Director  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane – Room 14-71  
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Dr. Crawford:

Two months ago, the Swedish National Food Administration announced its discovery of acrylamide in a variety of baked and fried foods available in Sweden. The Swedish findings have subsequently been corroborated by British, Norwegian, and Swiss government scientists. There is general agreement that acrylamide causes a variety of cancers in laboratory animals and is probably carcinogenic to humans. The Swedish government scientists estimated that acrylamide contamination in food was likely causing several hundred cancers per year.

To determine whether foods commonly available in the U.S. are contaminated with acrylamide, the Center for Science in the Public Interest commissioned the Swedish National Food Administration to conduct tests using its LC-MS-MS method. As expected, popular brands of fried potatoes (McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC), snack chips (Pringles potato crisps, Tostitos corn tortilla chips, Fritos corn chips), cooked frozen French fries (Ore Ida) and breakfast cereals (Cheerios, Honey Nut Cheerios) contain worrisome levels of acrylamide. In contrast, taco shells (Old El Paso) and boiled potatoes contained little or no acrylamide.

Judging from acrylamide levels in Swedish and American foods, and U.S. food consumption patterns, acrylamide contamination in American foods may be causing several thousand cancers per year. That represents a serious health problem that deserves urgent FDA attention. The fact that acrylamide has long contaminated cooked foods is not reason to be less concerned now.

We recognize that our survey included foods that represent only a tiny portion of the food supply. A broader survey could begin teasing out reasons for the different levels of acrylamide. We urge the FDA to follow the lead of foreign governments and test a wide range of foods and announce the results to the public. The FDA also should encourage food manufacturers to announce the results of their tests.

- Page 2 -

The FDA, working with industry and academic scientists, should be making every effort to understand the chemical reactions that lead to the formation of acrylamide and to identify ways to inhibit those reactions. In the meantime, the FDA should advise people to cut back on foods that are the least nutritious and most contaminated (based on the tests of Swedish, British, Norwegian, Swiss, and U.S. foods) with acrylamide: French fries and snack chips.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

cc: Joseph Levitt