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Press Release

## Consumer Watchdog to FDA: Mislabeled Food Products a Bad 'Choice' for Consumers

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*New Cranberry Skins Product Falsely Posing as Sweetened Dried Cranberries*

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Today the National Consumers League (NCL) called on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to investigate misleading labeling involving a new food product, Ocean Spray's "Choice." According to NCL, the nation's oldest consumer advocacy organization, the product is sold to food manufacturers as a "sweetened dried cranberry" but contains more sugar than actual fruit and is made from cranberry skins - not whole cranberries.

"Sweetened dried cranberries (SDCs) have become the common or usual name for a popular ingredient in a variety of foods, capitalizing on the healthy image of cranberries and cranberry juice," wrote Sally Greenberg, NCL Executive Director, in a letter to the FDA. The consumer group is concerned that, because this product is being sold as a "sweetened dried cranberry" for manufacturers' use in breakfast cereals, cereal bars, baked goods, and trail mixes, it has the potential to result in the mislabeling of these food products.

NCL's request that FDA investigate Ocean Spray's Choice product is the latest in the organization's longtime work in food safety, nutrition, and truth-in-labeling advocacy. After NCL called on the FDA to investigate claims made by Cheerios(R)-maker General Mills last fall, this spring the federal agency issued a cease-and-desist letter to the cereal manufacturer because the health claims exceed those permitted for food products. In August, NCL sued General Mills in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for continuing to claim that eating Cheerios(R) would reduce total and "bad" cholesterol.

The mislabeling of sugar-heavy products such as dried fruit, according to NCL, is of particular interest to consumers who may seek the nutrition benefits of sweetened dried cranberries without realizing they're eating--and paying for--something that is actually quite different.

SDCs are the fastest-growing segment of the cranberry market and traditionally consist of dried cranberries that have been infused with sugar and coated with a small amount of sunflower oil. Ocean Spray Cranberries Ingredient Technology Group recently introduced the "Choice" product to food manufacturers as a less expensive alternative to SDCs on the market. Foods currently on the market that NCL believes contain Ocean Spray Choice SDC are Ann's House Good Health Energy (a blend of soy nuts, cranberries, almonds and pumpkin kernels); Nature Valley Fruit Bars; and Pepperidge Farm Chewy Granola Cookies.

Laboratory analyses by Krueger Food Laboratories, commissioned by NCL, on November 4, 2009, found that "Choice" is really little more than cranberry skin infused with sugar syrup, consisting primarily of inverted beet sugar and citric acid. These characteristics are inconsistent with products using whole cranberries. The cranberry content is so small that Ocean Spray must add color in the form of elderberry juice concentrate and acidity in the form of citric acid to simulate the color and acidity of cranberries. These findings are consistent with Ocean Spray's own claims that it uses 50 percent fewer cranberries to make "Choice" than the regular SDC product. Ocean Spray's marketing materials tout "Choice" as a low-cost SDC with the same taste, texture, appearance, and health benefits as other SDCs.

"Because of its minimal cranberry content and use of other ingredients to simulate the flavor and color of cranberries, Ocean Spray's Choice product should not be named 'sweetened dried cranberries,'" said Greenberg. "We question whether the word 'cranberries' should be allowed at all in the name of this product."

In addition, NCL said that the product label's ingredients declaration, which lists cranberries as the predominant ingredient, is misleading and inaccurate." Greenberg stated that "according to our lab analyses, this is false and should be corrected to list sugar as the predominant ingredient." All food labels are required to list ingredients in descending order of predominance by weight.

To read NCL's letter to the FDA or to learn more about NCL's work in food safety and nutrition, visit [www.nclnet.org/food](http://www.nclnet.org/food) .

*About the National Consumers League*

The *National Consumers League* , founded in 1899, is America's pioneer consumer organization. Our mission is to protect and promote social and economic justice for consumers and workers in the United States and abroad. For more information, visit [www.nclnet.org](http://www.nclnet.org) .

SOURCE National Consumers League

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