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ENZI CALLS ON FDA TO END CONSUMER CONFUSION; ENSURE PROPER LABELING OF SWEETENERS USED IN SOFT DRINKS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today continued to push the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ensure better labeling of soft drinks containing corn syrup, asking the agency to detail how it plans to require labeling of sweeteners used in soft drinks, following the withdrawal of rules allowing ambiguous labeling standards.

“At a time when the number of Americans are closely monitoring what they eat, it’s especially important for the FDA be diligent with its oversight of food labeling,” Enzi said, following the release of a letter to Acting Commissioner Lester M. Crawford. “I request that you advise me as to FDA’s plans to ensure proper labeling of soft drinks and what enforcement authority you intend to exercise to ensure proper labeling,” Enzi wrote to Dr. Crawford.

Soft drinks have been poorly labeled for years with ambiguous information on the sweeteners they contain. Under a previously-proposed FDA rule, manufacturers have been allowed to use a blanket description for the sweeteners used in beverages such as “high fructose corn syrup and/or sugar.” The practice, Enzi believes, gives the impression that such beverages contain sugar when they actually contain high fructose corn syrup almost exclusively.

“Allowing this kind of ambiguity in labeling does not benefit consumers, and may have a negative impact on some,” Enzi said. “There is a difference between corn sweetener and sugar. Health-conscious consumers need the right labeling information to make the most informed decisions.”

It has been reported that the extra concentrated high fructose corn sweetener used in soft drinks and many other bottled drinks may play a role in obesity and other health problems.

Prior to November 26, 2004, the FDA was considering a final rule to allow manufacturers to label soft drinks and beverages with a uniform “and/or” declaration of the sweeteners used. Pending a final rule change, manufacturers were not required to specifically disclose whether the sweetener used was sugar or high fructose corn syrup.

“To ensure that American consumers have accurate, unambiguous, information on the beverages they purchase, the FDA should follow through with its withdrawal of the proposed rule on ‘and/or’ labeling for soft drinks,” Enzi wrote in a previous letter to the FDA on June 2, 2004. At that time, he not only called on the FDA to withdraw the proposed rule, but to stop allowing soft drink manufacturers to use labeling that misleads consumers about how their beverages are sweetened.

