



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

December 28, 2022

The Honorable Robert M. Califf, M.D., MACC
Commissioner of Food and Drugs
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Califf:

On behalf of the state of Wisconsin, I write today to share my concern about the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) proposed update to the definition of the term "healthy." The proposed definition will have consequences for Wisconsin farmers and consumers, and I strongly encourage you to reconsider this definition change as it is currently proposed.

Wisconsin is the nation's top producer of cranberries, growing 59 percent of the nationwide total. Our experienced growers produced 4.17 million barrels of cranberries in 2021. Wisconsin is also known for its tart cherry production. In 2021, Wisconsin ranked fourth nationally in production of tart cherries, producing 10.5 million pounds of the fruit. Wisconsin cranberries and tart cherries are consumed both locally and globally.

The FDA's proposed update to the definition of "healthy" will negatively impact these Wisconsin farmers and their families by excluding fruits with added sugar. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, last year processed cranberries accounted for 96 percent of the state's utilized cranberry production. As part of the processing of cranberries and cherries, sugar is only added as needed to meet the needs of the product and expectations of the consumer. While sugar may need to be added to these tart fruits due to their lack of naturally occurring sugar, this addition does not eliminate the many health benefits of cranberries and cherries. For example, cranberries are a rich source of Vitamin C, benefiting skin, muscles, and bones. They are also an excellent source of antioxidants. And cherries are a good source of fiber to aid in digestion and provide the body with potassium. Cranberries and tart cherries are also filled with numerous other vitamins and minerals that are essential to a nutritious diet.

By selectively labeling some fruits as "healthy", other fruits such as cranberries and tart cherries will be left out, hurting farmers and consumers across the nation. A misaligned label of "healthy" would put these fruits at a disadvantage to others on the store shelves. This could keep customers from choosing these products without ever reading the nutrition facts or ingredients for themselves in order to make an informed decision.

Both before and throughout the coronavirus pandemic, I have invested tens of millions of dollars in food security initiatives to support Wisconsin farmers and consumers and worked to expand efforts connecting Wisconsin-grown foods directly to local schools, businesses, and families in need, among others. This crucial funding has enabled the purchase of foods from Wisconsin producers to feed Wisconsin families in need. Ultimately, the future of Wisconsin's cranberry and tart cherry industries relies on customer demand as well as consumers choosing to include them in a balanced diet. I strongly urge you to reconsider your proposed definition update of "healthy" to ensure Wisconsin farmers can prosper and all consumers have access to affordable, nutritious fruits, including those from Wisconsin. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Evers".

Tony Evers
Governor