Is Carrageenan Safe to Use in Infant Formulas?

Marinalg International

WASHINGTON — At its 79th meeting in June, the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) completed an in-depth review [1] of the science related to the safety of carrageenan — a soluble fiber made from red seaweed and used as a stabilizer in food — finding it to be safe for use in infant formula, including formula for special medical purposes.

JECFA is a respected scientific review panel that evaluates the safety of food additives. Its reports are used to guide food additive regulatory approvals around the world and are among the most important testimonials to the safety of any food additive that can be given. Carrageenan was one of four food additives reviewed in 2014 for use in infant formula by a special JECFA committee.

After reviewing available research on carrageenan safety, particularly a new study of piglets that is representative of human infants consuming carrageenan in infant formula, JECFA concluded that “the use of carrageenan in infant formula or formula for special medical purposes at concentrations up to 1000 mg/L is not of concern.”

JECFA’s findings are the latest in a series of global reviews examining scientific research on carrageenan and reaffirming its safety for continued use in food, including infant formula. The piglet study cited by JECFA was conducted by an independent laboratory and supported by carrageenan producers and related industries. As recently as 2013, U.S. regulatory agencies continued approval of carrageenan for use in organic infant formula and other organic food.

“We fully support the findings of JECFA, as they underscore the long history of safe use of carrageenan in foods,” said Marinalg International President Bill Matakas. “We believe the findings are reflective of the informed science that has repeatedly affirmed carrageenan’s safety. The use of carrageenan to stabilize infant formula has significant positive impacts on the product, including ensuring vital nutrients remain stable and available to infants. We are pleased that JECFA has affirmed its safety for such an important use.”

Some critics of carrageenan have cited scientific findings in regulatory comments or in social media that refer to animal testing using poligeenan, a substance sometimes improperly referred to as “degraded carrageenan” that is never used in foods. Other critics have suggested that food-grade carrageenan might break down during digestion into a potentially harmful substance. Informed, carefully conducted science has consistently shown that food grade carrageenan is safe and binds so tightly to protein that it cannot be broken down into poligeenan during digestion.

“The carrageenan we use today in food has undergone strenuous review by numerous regulatory agencies around the world and in every single case it has been declared safe,” Matakas said. “Its unique abilities to stabilize food, to replace

fat or to extend shelf life in certain uses make it an important asset in not just the enjoyment of food, but also in the effort to provide safe, affordable food—including infant formula—to all parts of the world."

For the full JECFA summary, visit www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/Summary79.pdf?ua=1 [2].

Carrageenan in its raw form, sometimes called "Irish moss," has been eaten and used as a food ingredient for hundreds of years across the globe. The name carrageenan is derived from the Irish word carraigín, meaning "little rock," as the seaweed naturally forms on small rocks in coastal waters. Today, carrageenan is sustainably farmed and processed for use as a stabilizing ingredient in a variety of foods, including dairy, meat and drink products.

About Marinalg:

Marinalg International is a global organization supporting the interests of seaweed farmers, consumers and the hydrocolloids industry, including carrageenan. Marinalg supports the dissemination of sound science and technical expertise related to the safety and efficacy in the production and use of hydrocolloids from seaweed farms to family tables. Marinalg represents the regulatory interests of the seaweed-processing industry before various international bodies, such as Codex Alimentarius, and national regulatory authorities, including the European Food Safety Authority, the U.S Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For more information about carrageenan visit www.Marinalg.org *[3].*

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