WhiteWave to Remove Critical Ingredient from Horizon, Silk Milks

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — WhiteWave Foods says it will remove an ingredient from Horizon milks and Silk beverages in response to customer feedback.

Carrageenan, a seaweed extract that is used as a thickener and emulsifier, will be phased out from Horizon and Silk products over time, said Sara Loveday, a company spokeswoman.

The ingredient has been the subject of criticism in some circles, with natural-food advocates pointing to animal studies that suggest it causes gastrointestinal inflammation and other problems.

Loveday says WhiteWave still thinks carrageenan is safe, but decided to remove it because customer feedback has been so strong.

"When you get to a certain point of how vocal and strongly a consumer feels about it, we felt it was time to make a change," she said.

It's just the latest example of a food maker removing an ingredient customers found objectionable. Regardless of whether an ingredient is safe, companies are finding themselves under growing pressure from customer sensitivities about ingredients, especially given their ability to mobilize on social media sites.

Among those that have been criticizing the use of carrageenan in foods are Vani Hari, who runs the site Foodbabe.com, and The Cornucopia Institute, a farm policy group based in Wisconsin. Mark Kastel, co-founder of The Cornucopia Institute, said the decision reflects the rise of "people power," especially given how much more informed consumers are today.

WhiteWave, based in Broomfield, Colorado, did not immediately detail when the ingredient would be phased out of various products. But in a communication with Hari that was shared with The Associated Press, the company said carrageenan will be removed from Horizon flavored milked in the first quarter of next year. It will be removed from all other Horizon items such as eggnog, low-fat cottage cheese and heavy whipping cream, by the second quarter of 2015, the statement said.

The ingredient will be removed from its top five Silk Soy and Coconut drinks by the second quarter of 2015 and other Silk products in 2016.

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