

# YOUR FOOD LABEL IS LYING TO YOU

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Servings Size	2/3 cup
Servings Per Container	6
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>220</b>
% Daily Value	
Total Fat 2g	8%
Saturated Fat 2g	6%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 120mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 8g	32%
Sugars 18g	18%
Total Sugars 18g	18%
Protein 6g	
Vitamin A	20%
Calcium	6%
Vitamin C	6%
Zinc	16%



BY MARK HYMAN, MD  
AND BRIANNA BELLA-HYMAN

# YOUR FOOD LABEL IS LYING TO YOU

Big Food exploits loopholes, splits sugars, hides additives, and buries GMOs behind QR codes—letting ultra-processed products masquerade as healthy while consumers are kept in the dark

The FDA's new January 2025 front-of-package (FOP) proposal aims to highlight sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat in simple “low/medium/high” categories.

Sounds promising.

## But here's how it becomes another gift to Big Food:

- **Oversimplified categories** (“low” sugar could still mean 8 teaspoons)
- **Loophole-friendly thresholds** set after heavy industry lobbying
- **Voluntary early phases** that allow companies to stall for years
- No attention to processing, additives, or emulsifiers

It's transparency theater—letting companies slap a feel-good label on engineered junk.

A cereal could still be a metabolic landmine but earn a “medium” or even “low” sugar badge with clever reformulation...while still loaded with emulsifiers, dyes, gums, and processed starches.

The illusion of health without the substance.

One of the simplest reforms—label added sugars in teaspoons—is also the most feared.



A soda lists  
“39 grams” of sugar.  
Most people can't  
visualize that.  
But 39 grams is  
nearly 10 teaspoons.

Imagine if every soda, yogurt, cereal, and “healthy” snack bar had to say: *Contains 10 teaspoons of sugar*.

Big Food knows this would shift consumer behavior almost immediately. So the labels stay in grams, where confusion works in their favor.

# WHEN YOUR GROCERY STORE READS LIKE A CHEMISTRY TEXTBOOK

You shouldn't need a nutrition degree to buy yogurt.

Yet here we are, confronted with ingredient lists full of mono- and diglycerides, carrageenan, maltodextrin, soy lecithin, and a whole alphabet of gums, stabilizers, and mystery powders that never existed in your grandmother's kitchen.

Those aren't harmless extras. Many of these are emulsifiers and chemical additives that can disrupt the gut, inflame the immune system, and contribute to metabolic dysfunction. A decent rule of thumb still holds:

If you can't pronounce it—  
or you wouldn't cook with it at home—  
be skeptical about eating it.

And yet, most people don't read ingredients at all. Why? Because the system is quietly designed to make sure they don't.

- **Ingredients are buried on the back of packages**
- **The font is so tiny it practically requires a magnifying glass to read—often around 1/16 of an inch**
- **All caps, crammed lines, low contrast—every design trick that makes something harder to read**

That's not a graphic design accident. As Jerold Mande, a former FDA and USDA official who helped design food labels, explains, many companies don't want you to see what's actually in their products, so they make the information as inaccessible as possible.

Even when you *do* decode the list, there's another sleight of hand built into the rules.

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# INGREDIENT LISTS: WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED

One of Big Food's favorite (and most deceptive) tricks lives in the ingredients list, called "sugar splitting."

By law, ingredients must be listed by predominance. If "sugar" is the main ingredient, it should appear first.

## Ingredient splitting—a favorite trick of Big Food:

- Instead of listing "sugar" once, a company can break it into cane sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, dextrose, malt syrup, etc
- Each one appears in smaller amounts, pushed lower on the list
- Visually, it looks like sugar is a minor player—even if, combined, it's the single largest component

Example: Smucker's strawberry jam.

### INGREDIENTS:

- Strawberries
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Corn syrup
- Sugar



Three forms of sugar—just separated and lowered. Intentional deception.

They also take advantage of the vague ordering rules. "List ingredients by weight" sounds transparent. But the law doesn't require the percentage of each ingredient.

### SUGAR COULD BE:

- 5% of the product
- 30% of the product

...and the label would look the same.

Big Food also relies on microscopic fonts and giant, unbroken blocks of text—making labels so hard to read that most people give up before finding the truth. Presumably, their logic is: if consumers can't see the information, it might as well not exist.

And finally, the "natural flavors" black box.

### "NATURAL FLAVORS" CAN LEGALLY HIDE:

- Solvents
- Preservatives

### Additives

### Synthetic compounds

### Flavor boosters

It's a chemical cocktail disguised with a folksy name.

Their last, and arguably most pernicious trick, is the "health" claim reformulation technique. This is the classic "strip-the-ingredients-of-all-naturally-containing-nutrients" through ultraprocessing, and "fortify" them in the product on the back-end with synthetic versions.

Using a strategy called "Nutritionism," where food manufacturers focus on specific nutrient ingredients rather than the full profile of health, it allows label claims like:

- "High protein"
- "Low-fat"
- "Heart healthy"
- "Made with whole grains"
- "Includes vitamins!"

...on products that are still ultra-processed, sugar-splitting, emulsifier-heavy junk.

It's health-washing, not health.

Confused  
Yet?

# GMO LABELING: A MASTERCLASS IN CONSUMER CONFUSION

GMO labeling is the perfect example of Big Food's long-game deception.

For decades, over 90% of Americans said they wanted GMO labels. So the industry spent hundreds of millions fighting them through:

- **Lobbying**
- **PR campaigns**
- **Dark money**
- **Astroturf “grassroots” groups**
- **Fear-mongering about cost**

## **The result was the infamous DARK Act (Denying Americans the Right to Know):**

- It overturned strong state GMO labeling laws
- Replaced them with a watered-down federal standard
- Allowed companies to hide GMO disclosure behind QR codes, 1-800 numbers, or websites
- Many refined GMO ingredients are exempt if they contain no detectable genetic material

## **It's 'transparent' labeling that people can't actually see.**

Most Americans don't scan QR codes while grocery shopping. In rural or low-income areas, many don't have smartphones or reliable internet service.

So legally, the label exists, but practically, the consumer learns nothing.

Astroturfing (fake grassroots campaigns) in Washington State illustrated just how far the industry will go:

- **Companies like** Coke, Pepsi, Nestlé, Kellogg's, and General Mills funneled millions through the Grocery Manufacturers Association
- **They ran fake “farmer” ads** against GMO labeling
- **They hid corporate donors** through secret “multiple-use” war chests
- **They used misinformation** campaigns to confuse voters
- **This was not a PR battle.** It was a war on transparency.



# THE PATTERN: OBSCURE, DELAY, SPLIT, AND DISTRACT

Big Food's label strategy is consistent across all fronts:

- **Pretend to support** transparency
- **Redefine transparency** into something unusable
- **Use technicalities, loopholes, and font tricks** to hide the real information
- **Shift responsibility to the consumer**—“we labeled it; you didn’t interpret it correctly”

It's the same playbook perfected by Big Tobacco and Big Oil. And it's working.

Want to understand the entire machinery behind Big Food's

[Pre-order Today!](#)

label manipulation—how they hide ingredients, manipulate sugar, bury additives, and weaponize consumer confusion?

Explore the full story (and the solutions) in *Food Fix Uncensored*, coming to book stores near you on February 10. It unmasks the dark arts of food labeling—and gives you the tools to finally see what's really in your food.

