Sugar Fight Takes Another Bitter Turn

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NEW YORK (AP) — What defines sugar? It's getting to be a stickier question.

The Sugar Association is accusing the makers of high fructose corn syrup of trying to candy-coat their image by calling their product a "sugar." The Corn Refiners Association is firing back by calling the accusations another attempt to censor its efforts to explain to the public that high fructose corn syrup is, well, a form of sugar.

The latest twist in the spat came after a recent medical study prompted headlines such as "Sugar can make you dumb." The Sugar Association issued a release this week noting the substance used in the study was actually fructose, not its sugar. The group blamed a "multimillion-dollar advertising campaign" by the Corn Refiners Association for generating the confusion.

Audrae Erickson, president of Corn Refiners Association, says the Sugar Association's press release this week "seems to be an effort to silence the campaign" to educate consumers.

The two sides have been at odds for some time now.

Given the negative image of high fructose corn syrup in recent years, the Corn Refiners Association in 2010 submitted an application to the federal government to have the sweetening agent renamed "corn sugar" on nutrition labels. That decision is still pending.

The group has also been running a marketing campaign to explain that its syrup is actually a form of sugar and has the same nutritional value as the white, granular table sugar consumers are familiar with.

That prompted a lawsuit from the Sugar Association last year claiming the campaign was misleading. An attorney for the group, John Burlingame, says it's not trying to stifle free speech with its lawsuit or latest statement. It just wants to point out that high fructose corn syrup is chemically distinct and derived from a different source than sugar.

High fructose corn syrup came into the U.S. market in the late 1970s and 1980s. The product is used widely in cereals, sodas and other processed food and drinks because it's cheaper and mixes easily into recipes. Despite the name, the Corn Refiners Association says the most common forms of it are about half fructose and half glucose.

The American Medical Association has said there's not enough evidence to restrict the use of high fructose corn syrup, although it wants more research. The Center for Science in the Public Interest has said that there was no evidence that the

sweetener is any worse for the body than sugar — and that Americans eat too much of both of them.

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