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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE  
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND URBAN  
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**TIM RYAN**  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
13TH DISTRICT, OHIO

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

October 27, 2014

Margaret A. Hamburg  
Commissioner  
U.S. Food & Drug Administration  
10903 New Hampshire Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Hamburg:

As you are aware, we have an ongoing obesity and diabetes epidemic in the U. S., especially among our nation's youth. For the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. According to the American Diabetes Association, 29.1 million Americans in 2012 had diabetes, which is up from 25.8 million in 2010. This is translating into skyrocketing healthcare costs.

As of March 2013, more than 1 in 10 health care dollars in the U.S. are spent directly on diabetes and its complications, and more than 1 in 5 health care dollars in the U.S. goes to the care of people with diagnosed diabetes. This resulted in \$176 billion spent for direct medical costs associated with diabetes in 2012.

Studies have shown that one of the biggest contributors to this debilitating and costly trend is the amount of sugar Americans are consuming. While many diets, healthy-eating campaigns, and food companies are highlighting the negative ramifications of fat in our food, we too often ignore the massive amount of sugar in nearly every processed food item. Recently, the World Health Organization proposed guidelines that would encourage people to consume no more than 5% of their total daily calories from sugars. For the average adult, this would equate to approximately 25 grams of sugar, or six teaspoons. I applaud the leadership that you and the FDA have done over the years in advancing the scope of nutrition labeling and transparency. However, I feel that more needs to be done to clarify the true content and consequences of sugar in our food.

I have always felt that one of the primary keys to healthier eating is education and understanding your choices. Along those lines, more needs to be done to make the true content of sugar in foods clearer to the general public, which can be confusing for a number of reasons. First and foremost, sugar can come in the form of a multitude of differently named ingredients, such as corn sweetener, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, sucrose, molasses, fruit juice concentrates, among others. Another often confusing aspect of nutrition labeling is the difference

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between natural and added sugars. There is also no labeling guidance to help consumers delineate what minimum amount of sugar begins to be harmful to a person and in what way.

I urge the FDA to enact a clearer and more tangible way of labeling the sugar content in foods. I believe that labeling sugar in the form of teaspoons would be a much easier way for consumers to conceptualize the true amount of sugar in a food product. I understand that converting a unit of weight to a unit of volume poses challenges and may require estimations, however I am also confident that food producers can reasonable estimate a conversion between grams of the type of sugar used in their product to an equivalent in teaspoons of white granulated sugar—the type of sugar Americans are most likely to be familiar with in their homes.

Taking this small step would stand to significantly improve consumer knowledge and, I believe, would help Americans make better choices in their diet. I appreciate you taking this into consideration and look forward to working with you as we look for ways to decrease the prevalence of obesity and diabetes in the United States.

Sincerely,



Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress