News Release
For Immediate Release

Update on Stevia As A Non-Caloric Sweetener

Stevia-derived Sweetener - GRAS

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has declared highly purified Reb A sweeteners {rebaudioside A (rebiana)}, as generally recognized as safe (GRAS). Derived from the stevia bush plant native to Central and South America, it can now be used as a general purpose sweetener and as an ingredient in foods and beverages. Both purified forms are 200-300 times sweeter than sugar and are calorie-free.

New stevia-based sweeteners have presented some safety concerns. Until November, 2008, stevia-based sweeteners were only approved by FDA as a dietary supplement although they had been used in South America and Japan for some time. The question arises as whether or not they could be considered a better option than the non-nutritive sweeteners—saccharin, aspartame, Acesulfame-K, sucralose, neotame— currently available.

Is Stevia Safe?
The safety of Rebaudioside A (and to a lesser extent, stevioside) for humans to eat has been tested through peer-reviewed research. Studies with type 1 and 2 diabetic subjects, and those with hypertension, have all shown no adverse effects with purified form of Reb A doses of approximately 4 to 15 milligrams/kilograms of body weight per day.

In June 2008, the World Health Organization’s Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives, a global panel of food ingredient safety experts, completed a multi-year review of the available scientific data on high purity stevia compounds. They found both are safe for use as general purpose sweeteners. They set a safe daily intake of 0-4 milligrams per kilogram of body weight as steviol glycosides.

What Do These Findings Mean?
FDA supports the findings of the studies that Reb A-based sweeteners are considered safe for consumption as tabletop sweeteners or ingredients in foods and beverages. Since the studies used the highly purified compound Reb A, these findings do not support other stevia-derived sweeteners until research supports approved by the FDA.

At this time, no data exists that Reb A-based sweeteners offer a clinical advantage over any other non-nutritive sweeteners, although studies are ongoing to test whether there are natural plant compounds that offer some additional health benefits.

FDA’s GRAS status cleared the way for beverage companies to release their drinks containing the more purified form of the sweetener truvia.

To date, recommendations for the use of stevia (not to be confused with the GRAS-approved, purified compound) for persons with diabetes have not been released by the American Diabetes
Association, the American Dietetic Association or the American Association of Diabetes Educators as no upper tolerable limit has been identified. As more research becomes available, you can check with a registered dietitian and/or other health professionals for whether or not stevia can be used by persons with diabetes.

Contact ______________________, Texas AgriLife Extension Service _____________ County agent at _____________________, for more information.

References:
1. Stevia: Are stevia-based sweeteners a healthier alternative to other non-caloric sweeteners? American Dietetic Association Topic Discussion, eatright.org, June, 2009

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