Do the Fed's 'Healthy' School Snacks Simply Dress Up Junk Food?

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Starting this fall, new federal standards for the types of snacks and beverages allowed in school cafeterias across the country will start to roll out. The new rules are part of an ongoing effort by the government to help improve the nutritional content of foods available in our nation's schools, writes Michelle Simon, a public health lawyer and advocate, in a Time.com op-ed.

One problem, though: According to Simon, the new "healthy" treats OK'd by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to replace existing snacks don't really cut it in terms of being good sources of nutrition. The "reduced fat" Cheetos, "whole-grain" Pop-Tarts and "low-sugar" Gatorade still contain unhealthy ingredients, including artificial sweeteners and dyes.

"Big Food put its sophisticated R&D departments to work, and out came 'USDA-compliant' junk food," wrote Simon, who is president of the corporate watchdog firm Eat Drink Politics. But "is it really better now?"

Simon thinks not. She believes that corporations—supported by the federal government—are fooling kids with their "deceptive marketing messages on health-washed junk foods" the better to hook them on a lifetime of crappy eating habits.

For more information about the USDA's Smart Snacks initiative, click here.

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