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Report Name: Instant Soups Study Raises Health Concerns in Mexico

Country: Mexico

Post: Mexico City ATO

Report Category: Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

On October 4, 2021, the Consumer Protection Agency (PROFECO) announced that nine brands of instant soup would be temporarily removed from the market due to noncompliance with Mexican labeling laws, namely misleading declarations regarding product content, or because of high levels of ingredients perceived to pose health risks, such as fats, salt, sugar, and calories. This announcement came just days after PROFECO published in its consumer magazine, ‘Revista del Consumidor’, a study on instant soups indicating that the excessive consumption of these products could cause severe health risks as they are high in sugar, fats, carbohydrates, and some contain ingredients made from genetically engineered (GE) material.

Background

PROFECO and Revista del Consumidor

PROFECO is an organization of the Mexican government. It is led by the Attorney General and is tasked to protect consumers against fraud and abuse by companies operating in Mexico.

Since 1976, PROFECO has issued the ‘*Revista del Consumidor*’ monthly. PROFECO’s intent with the magazine is to provide product and services information to Mexican consumers and to create awareness for better purchasing decisions. Each month the magazine publishes a study providing information about brands, prices, quality, and compliance with Mexican regulations and standards.

Instant Soups in Mexico

Instant soups were introduced in Northern Mexico in 1988 as an occasional snack. They have since become a staple in the Mexican diet due to their convenience and low cost. Additionally, instant soups have gained popularity among younger consumers by adding toppings like meats, corn, and snacks. The rise of Korean pop culture has also influenced demand for noodle soups.

According to the World Instant Noodles Association (WINA), Mexico ranks in 15th place worldwide in instant noodle consumption with a value in 2020 of 1.16 billion servings.¹ Mexicans eat noodles with salsa sauce, chili sauce, and limes. Shrimp, beef, chicken, and cheese flavors are popular. According to PROFECO, Mexico ranks as Latin America’s second-largest instant soup consumer after Brazil. The following chart shows the main countries that export soups and related products to Mexico in 2020:

Table 1: Global Exports of Soups and Broths and Preparations to Mexico, 2016 –2020

Country	Volume (Tons)	Value (USD)
World	86,8732	\$241,317,230
United States	85,732	\$238,873,091
EU 27 External Trade (Brexit)	484	\$636,536
Guatemala	331	\$633,981
Brazil	178	\$438,296
Chile	82	\$586,624

Source: Trade Data Monitor

PROFECO Instant Soup Study

On October 1, the ‘*Revista del Consumidor*’ released a study on instant soups mentioning the health risks that excessive consumption of these products can cause as they are high in sodium, fats, carbohydrates, and contain ingredients made using GE inputs such as high fructose syrup. The study also claims that these products are not nutritious.

¹ Source: World Instant Noodle Association – Demand Rankings [World Instant Noodles Association](https://www.winaind.com/).

The study assessed 33 instant soup varieties under such parameters as the regulation compliance in net content (NOM-002-SCFI-2011), labeling, commercial and sanitary information (NOM-051-SCFI/SSA1-2010), and food and beverages modifications (NOM-086-SSA1-1994). On the labeling compliance, it included the recent NOM-051 front-of-package labeling regulations including warning signs, cautionary labels, and no characters on the front of pack labeling. Additionally, it included product names, ingredients, instructions, name and addresses of the manufacturer or importer, countries of origin, lot numbers, expiration dates, net contents, and if any information or claim was untruthful.

The study divided instant soups into four categories, including 1. bowl/cup, 2. flavored soups, 3. *sopa de fideo*, a Mexican-style noodle soup, and 4. Asian-style soups. These categories include domestic and imported brands from the United States, Korea, Germany, and Japan.

Twelve U.S. products appeared in PROFECO's study and were cited for containing high calories, sodium, and carbohydrates. PROFECO also claimed that some U.S. products contained misleading declarations of vegetable or meat contents. Regarding compliance with the labeling regulations, some brands did not include instructions in Spanish, and the energy content declared did not correspond to the labeled product.

Mexican Authorities Take Action

On October 4, 2021, PROFECO announced that nine brands of soup products would be removed from the market due to noncompliance with labeling requirements, namely false claims of vegetable or meat contents, or because they contain high levels of ingredients that are perceived to pose health risks, such as fats, salt, sugar, and calories. Three U.S. brands were negatively affected because PROFECO cited high levels of sodium and carbohydrates, or because nutritional information was not adequately declared, which is mandatory under the labeling standard NOM-051. Additionally, PROFECO warned about the health risk of microwaving Styrofoam cups, claiming that chemicals are released during heating.

Photos 1 and 2: PROFECO Raids Mexican Supermarkets over Instant Soups



It is important for U.S. exporters to comply with the labeling regulations. PROFECO is authorized to remove products from store shelves for noncompliance with regulations, as well as issue fines and even ban product from the Mexican market.

Post expects additional similar studies for other popular retail products, as well as more retail-level raids will be forthcoming over the next several months.

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Attachments:

No Attachments.