ICA Statement on the research article “Food additive emulsifiers and cancer risk” by Sallem et al. (2024)

ICA reiterates its steadfast commitment to ensuring the safety and regulatory compliance of cellulosic food additives, particularly in light of recent discussions regarding their potential implications raised by the study on emulsifiers by Sellem et al., 2024. While we appreciate more research and knowledge about the metabolism of these products, we believe that the article falls short of good scientific practices and offers conclusions not substantiated by the study design or the data produced; the study does not consider critical factors that influence cancer incidence: (1) environment and occupational exposures, (2) lifestyle factors and (3) health and medical history factors.

We would like to highlight the following points:

- **Rigorous Regulation and Quality Standards**: The utilization of cellulosics in food products is governed by a comprehensive framework of regulations and specifications, meticulously designed to uphold their purity and quality. Cellulosic food additives undergo rigorous evaluation and pre-market authorization processes, ensuring adherence to the highest safety standards. The safety and human health aspects are paramount, with manufacturers upholding stringent quality assurance protocols throughout production and distribution.

- **Global Recognition of Safety**: Cellulosic food additives have garnered widespread recognition from food safety authorities globally, including prominent regulatory bodies in the European Union, Australia New Zealand, Japan, and the USA. These approvals are predicated on exhaustive evaluations of scientific literature and safety data, affirming the safety of cellulosics for human consumption across diverse populations. Moreover, the long history of safe use, underscores the confidence placed in these additives by regulatory agencies and consumers alike.

- **Contextualization of Observational Studies**: The recent study, while leveraging a substantial dataset from the NutriNet-Santé e-cohort, was not explicitly designed to investigate the association between emulsifier consumption and cancer risk. As emphasized in the provided review, observational studies, though valuable for identifying correlations, possess inherent limitations in establishing causal relationships. Factors such as gaps in data regarding cancer risk, absence of serum biomarkers, and challenges in controlling for confounding variables necessitate cautious interpretation of findings. The absence of serum biomarkers of processing aid consumption makes it difficult to understand systemic exposure and dose effects, especially for materials that are known to have extremely limited or no absorption. For example, the apparent greater breast cancer risk compared to colon cancer risk is surprising, given the presumed mode of action via impacting the microbiome and intestinal inflammation.

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- **Transparent Reporting of Limitations**: Transparent reporting of study limitations is imperative to ensure the accurate interpretation and dissemination of research findings. Failure to acknowledge these limitations can result in misconceptions and misinterpretations, particularly in media coverage. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to candidly address the methodological constraints and potential biases inherent in observational studies to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the results.

In conclusion, ICA reaffirms its unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest standards of safety and regulatory compliance in the use of cellulosic food additives. Through rigorous adherence to established regulations, ongoing dialogue with regulatory authorities, and transparent communication of scientific evidence, we remain dedicated to fostering consumer confidence and ensuring the continued safety of cellulosics in food products worldwide.

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