



Written by [John Stossel](#) on November 22, 2023

You Can't Say That

My first Stossel TV Fellow, Trevor Kraus, initiated this column.

Our video version is called "[Freshly Cooked Censorship: Why You Can't Put 'Low FODMAP' on Food Labels.](#)"

Kraus reports that rigid government rules prevent food producers from informing you about useful foods, like low-FODMAP foods.

FODMAP is an acronym for sugars prevalent in garlic, onion, apples, honey and many other foods. Lots of Americans have an intolerance to FODMAPs. For a few, it can be deadly.



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Ketan Vakil, who's FODMAP intolerant himself, started a company that sells low-FODMAP foods like bone broths, garlic chive salt and green onion powder — all with fewer of the ingredients that can cause stomach problems.

"I decided to replace those ingredients with other things that taste great, but don't cause stomach symptoms," says Vakil. "We use the tops of scallions, just the green parts. They taste like onion. Not the exact flavor, but really similar. That part of the plant is lower in FODMAPs."

Sounds great.

But stupidly, the government won't let him say "low-FODMAP" on his labels.

It's not because Vakil is lying about ingredients or their usefulness. He's right in saying his labels have "scientific backing that the medical community accepts."

Doctors acknowledge that FODMAPs are a problem for some people, causing cramping, diarrhea, stomach bloating, etc. Choosing low-FODMAP products would help many.

But the government still won't allow Vakil to put "Low-FODMAP" on the label.

"We had to remove the Low-FODMAP certified symbol, 'gut-friendly,' all the words that would help a shopper find that product for themselves," says Vakil.

The government didn't actually "ban" those words. They just don't allow them because they're not already on the government's approved list.

So Justin Pearson, senior attorney at public interest law firm the Institute for Justice, is helping Vakil sue the government.

"Everyone agrees that Ketan is telling the truth," Pearson points out. "The government just bans it because it's not on the outdated, pre-approved list."

Some of the approved terms don't seem very scientific, or even specific. Ambiguous labels like "home style" and "deli fresh" are approved. But "Low-FODMAP," a more useful term, isn't allowed.

The "approved" list isn't even easy to find. It's scattered throughout several government websites. It



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took Kraus hours just to compile a *partial* list of what's approved.

"How do you get on that list?" Kraus asks Pearson.

"With a giant pile of money," Pearson replies, sarcastically referring to the years of lawyering and lobbying that would be required to get the Agriculture Department or the Food and Drug Administration to agree to a wording change.

Does the government ever update its list?

"No," says Pearson. "Why would they? Federal agencies do not respond to the market. Only businesses do."

Of course, some businesses make meaningless and deceptive claims. "We have a job to make sure consumers have access to accurate and useful new information," says the director of the FDA's Center for Food Safety.

Fine. But in this case, the bureaucracy is *banning* useful new information!

"It's hard enough to get a product out the door," says Vakil. "Not being able to explain it accurately to my customers, who we started the company for, is very frustrating. Laws that have been on the books for years harm my customer."

Lots of people suffer from a digestive problem. They don't want to wait for vendors like Vakil to struggle through the government's lengthy approval process.

Pearson says, "The best-case scenario: They could do it in a couple years. If you believe that, I have a bridge to sell you."

Vakil doesn't want to wait to help people. "I don't want to solve it for them in eight years. I want to solve it for them tomorrow."

If Vakil and Pearson win their case, it would be a game-changer not just for people who have trouble digesting garlic and onion, but for millions more whose lives could be improved by future diets we don't even know about.

Every Tuesday at JohnStossel.com, Stossel posts a new video about the battle between government and freedom. He is the author of Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media.

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