



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 1, 2011

## Pepsi Getting Heat for Use of Aborted Fetal Cells in Flavor Research

Shareholders of PepsiCo have filed a resolution with the Securities and Exchange Commission in an effort to force the company to stop contracting with a research firm that uses cells from aborted babies in its process of producing artificial flavor enhancers. According to LifeNews.com, Pepsi has “ignored concerns and criticism from dozens of pro-life groups and tens of thousands of pro-life people who voiced their opposition to PepsiCo contracting with biotech company Senomyx even after it was found to be testing their food additives using fetal cells from abortions.”



On its website Senomyx explains that its flavor research programs “focus on the discovery and development of savory, sweet and salt flavor ingredients that are intended to allow for the reduction of MSG, sugar and salt in food and beverage products. Using isolated human taste receptors, we created proprietary taste receptor-based assay systems that provide a biochemical or electronic readout when a flavor ingredient interacts with the receptor.”

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But Debi Vinnedge of [Children of God for Life](#), a pro-life group that has focused its attention on Pepsi’s relationship with Senomyx, pointed out that what the company does not reveal is that it is “using HEK293 — human embryonic kidney cells taken from an electively aborted baby to produce those receptors. They could have easily chosen animal, insect, or other morally obtained human cells expressing the G protein for taste receptors.”

When asked about her company’s use of HEK293, Senomyx vice president Gwen Rosenberg assured a reporter for the [Miami New Times](#) that “you won’t find anything on our website about HEK293.” Queried about the company’s position on stem-cell research, Rosenberg boasted, “We don’t have a position on anything. We’re dedicated to finding new flavors to reduce sugars and reduce salt. Our focus is to help consumers with diabetes or high blood pressure have a better quality of life.”

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Vinnedge recalled that in August Pepsi inked a four-year, \$30-million deal with Senomyx for the flavor company to develop artificial high-potency sweeteners for the beverage maker. The pro-life group contacted both companies, requesting them not to use fetal cells in the program, reminding them that there were other, non-objectionable, and fully viable alternatives. Senomyx ignored the letter altogether, while Pepsi officials replied with a blanket e-mail from “Pepsi Consumer Relations,” assuring those who contacted them with concerns that the company was “committed to using only the highest ethical methods in all aspects of our research. This is something we take very seriously, and we hold ourselves and all of our research partners to the same high standards as the world’s leading



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research centers.”

Regarding its relationship with Senomyx, PepsiCo explained that “we utilize techniques that have been the gold standard for several decades by top universities, hospitals, U.S. government agencies, food and beverage companies, and essentially every pharmaceutical and biotech company in the world.”

The e-mail also complained that there was “misinformation being circulated meant to distort what we’re doing and question our motives and those of other companies.” Bradley Mattes, executive director of [Life Issues Institute](#), one of the pro-life groups involved in the campaign, clarified: “While aborted fetal cells aren’t actually in the product itself, the close relationship is enough to repulse most consumers. To our knowledge, this is the first time a food product has been publicly associated with abortion.”

Brushing aside concerns that aborted babies were being used to help enhance their products, Pepsi pointed instead to the tradeoff, noting that the research would help the company create “lower-calorie, great-tasting beverages for consumers,” as well as “help us achieve our commitment to reduce added sugar per serving by 25% in key brands in key markets over the next decade and ultimately help people live healthier lives.”

In their resolution, the PepsiCo shareholders asked the company’s board of directors to adopt “a corporate policy that recognizes human rights and employs ethical standards which do not involve using the remains of aborted human beings in both private and collaborative research and development agreements.”

Said Vinnedge: “Shareholders have a right to know the truth about what PepsiCo is doing with their hard-earned savings. PepsiCo’s lack of consideration to the public’s moral sensibilities has only served to fuel the fire and threaten stock values, retirement pensions and investments.”

Ironically, PepsiCo’s own Code of Conduct includes the boast that they “deal with customers, suppliers, the public and our competitors in an ethical and appropriate manner.” Noted Vinnedge: “There is nothing ethical or appropriate in the way they are exploiting the remains of an innocent aborted child.”

In addition to sending letters to PepsiCo’s board of directors, Children of God for Life launched a Pepsi boycott that has been joined by other pro-life groups, including the American Life League, Colorado Right to Life, American Right to Life, and Sound Choice Pharmaceutical Institute. Bradley Mattes of Life Issues Institute, another of the groups participating in the boycott, told the [Christian Post](#) that “Pepsi has decided to dig in their heels and move forward, so I think the consumer concerned about the sanctity of human life should boycott.”

Vinnedge related the story of one 12-year-old Florida boy named Gene, who learned of PepsiCo’s connection to the use of the cells of aborted babies, and decided to join the Pepsi boycott in a big way. Gene explained his motivation to a pro-life audience: “When I found out about this, I was sick to my stomach. I decided I wouldn’t let this happen, so I came up with a way to boycott Pepsi products called United Schools for Life. This program will attempt to remove all Pepsi products from the schools in our diocese.”

Vinnedge said she was deeply moved by the youngster’s initiative and courage. “We hope that PepsiCo senior management gives serious consideration to what this boy has done,” she said. “Even a child knows this is wrong. God bless him for standing up for the unborn who have no voice of their own.”



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