

ARE YOU EATING BEETLES?

Cedar Park, TX – June 4, 2009

Most of us have seen episodes of the reality stunt show "Fear Factor," where contestants are asked to eat stomach-turning foods that only a vulture would enjoy. As disgusting as the foods may be, at least "Fear Factor" competitors are told ahead of time what they'll be putting in their mouths. Unfortunately, the same courtesy has not been extended by food manufacturers to millions of Americans, who unknowingly eat a form of "gross-out" food every day.

You see, food makers have known for a long time that people prefer to buy foods that have rich and vibrant colors. A shopper, for example, will generally choose a bright red tomato over a light colored tomato. This little "trick of the trade" has led some food companies to look to a strange source of food coloring: the Cochineal Beetle.

Without going into any "gut-wrenching" details, the abdomen of this creepy crawler is processed to produce a bright red food coloring, which is called "Carmine." Found in certain brands of yogurt, ice cream, and juice, this "all natural food coloring" has been linked to severe allergic reactions in a select group of sensitive individuals. Fortunately, for the majority of consumers, Carmine has not caused any known negative health effects. At issue, however, is the fact that most Americans have NO idea that they are eating the crushed bodies of insects.

Given the choice, how many people would prefer to avoid eating Carmine? Thanks to the FDA, we'll soon find out. By 2011, a new mandate states that food companies must list Carmine or Cochineal on all food labels that contain it. After all, unless there's a chance to win prize money, will anyone want to eat something that resembles a "Fear Factor" food? You'll be the judge.