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# **Edition Facts**

7 Sections This Edition Cases Per Section 1-4

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### **Reading Calories 0**

% rea	ling value
New Lawsuits Filed	100%
Motions to Dismiss	100%
Motion for Preliminary Injunction	100%
Class Certification	100%
Settlements	100%
Regulatory	100%
Appeals	100%



# **New Lawsuits Filed**

### No Fire Here, Just Smoke (Flavored) Cheese

Kinman v. The Kroger Company, No. 1:21-cv-01154 (N.D. III. Feb. 28, 2021).

Sheehan & Associates P.C. continues its campaign against flavors big and small, this time representing an Illinois consumer fired up about cheese. The putative class action alleges that a national grocery chain misleadingly distributes, markets, and sells "Smoked Gouda" cheese under its Private Selection brand and labels it as having a "distinctive, smoky flavor." Instead of harnessing the flames to impart this flavor, however, the grocer uses only an artificial liquid to give its gouda cheese its distinctive smokiness.

According the complaint, federal and state law require that a product's front label disclose the source of any "characterizing flavor." By not disclosing that the cheese is flavored by a liquid "smoke flavor" rather than from being smoked through the more traditional process, the suit claims the labels are deceptive and misleading. The complaint also claims that the ingredient list on the back label—which identifies smoke flavor as an ingredient—cannot cure the deception because reasonable consumers might still interpret "smoke flavor" to mean that the gouda was subjected to at least some smoking. The plaintiff seeks to represent classes of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Texas consumers and asserts claims for violations of state consumer protection laws, breach of warranty, negligent misrepresentation, fraud, and unjust enrichment.

### Same Same, but Different: Tandem Lawsuits Take Aim at Fruit Snacks and—Naturally—Puppy Shampoo

Levin v. Fetch For Pets LLC, No. 1:21-cv-01894 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 4, 2021). Thur v. Hornell Brewing Company, No. 2:21-cv-01200 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 5, 2021).

At first glance, a pair of putative class actions filed in New York federal courts should have nothing in common. One challenges a line of fruit snacks, the other a line of Martha Stewart branded pet shampoos and conditioners. Different law firms represent the plaintiff in each case. And the lawsuits challenge a slew of different ingredients.

But the two complaints bear an uncanny similarity. Filed on consecutive days, the two lawsuits copy verbatim stretches of allegations from each other. And they both push a common theme, playing up consumers' health consciousness by challenging the defendants' labeling their products "Natural" and "All Natural." According to the complaints, the defendants' "Natural" advertising and marketing is false and deceptive because the products contain allegedly artificial ingredients, like citric acid, gelatin, and glucose syrup in the fruit snacks, and cetearyl alcohol, glycerin, and DMDM hydantoin in the pet products.

Both complaints claim that reasonable consumers could not have discovered that the products contained the non-natural ingredients—even though the ingredients lists disclose all of those ingredients-because they "would not know the true nature of the ingredients merely by reading the ingredients label." To ascertain the truth, the complaints allege, consumers instead would have had to conduct "a scientific investigation [applying] knowledge of chemistry beyond that of the average consumer." Both consumers seek to represent nationwide and New York classes asserting claims for violations of breach of warranty, injunctive relief, unjust enrichment, and (for the New York class) violations of New York consumer protection laws.

### Consumer Claims Corporate Confectionary Cabal Can't Compare Candy Covers

Rand v. Kilwins Quality Confections Inc., No. 1:21-cv-01513 (N.D. III. Mar. 18, 2021)

A consumer lodged a suit against a Michigan confectionary company, alleging that by comparing various topping labels, he has uncovered a surreptitious scheme to overcharge consumers. He claims that the defendant both overstates the number of servings yet understates the number of calories per serving that its products contain.

The plaintiff claims he uncovered this alleged plot by comparing the nutrition facts panels of caramel topping products (which disclose that the products contain 20 servings with 110 calories per serving) with that of a different product, fudge topping (which discloses the product contains 16 servings with 140 calories per serving). The plaintiff also contends that the defendant's "Classic Shredded Chocolate" similarly overstates the number of serving sizes per container yet understates the number of calories per serving. These differing numbers, the plaintiff concludes, must mean that the defendant has violated various states' consumer protection laws and committed other unlawful conduct. The plaintiff seeks to certify nationwide and multistate classes for a range of consumer protection claims, breach of contract, and unjust enrichment.

### The Skinny on Weight-Loss Supplement Lawsuit: Have a Good Return Policy

### Bubak v. GOLO LLC, No. 1:21-cv-00492 (E.D. Cal. Mar. 24, 2021).

It's not all that surprising that a consumer sued a weight-loss supplement maker, claiming the supplement did not work. What is surprising is that the defendant could have avoided this lawsuit altogether. The plaintiff alleged that, dissatisfied with the product, she asked for a refund. The complaint reveals that the defendant allegedly agreed to give the consumer a refund but only if the consumer paid for shipping and handling. This lawsuit—and all of its litigation and regulatory headaches—followed.

Not only does the plaintiff challenge the product's efficacy but she also raises a host of allegations that likely will raise the eyebrows of any FDA regulator. The consumer took aim at the defendant's advertising of its "Release Supplement," which the defendant allegedly claimed was a "natural solution to insulin resistance." The consumer alleged that the defendant even promoted a questionnaire that could "diagnose" insulin resistance. This conduct, the









consumer contended, amounted to "implied disease" claims in violation of federal law, which rendered the product misbranded and illegal for sale in California. The consumer also claimed that the product had inadequate instructions and boasted a misleading claim that it was "clinically proven" to work.

The line between dealing with a filed putative class action or not is razor thin. In this case, the margin was the cost of shipping and handling.

## **Motions to Dismiss**

Procedural Posture: Granted with leave to amend

### Court Hands Vanilla Ice Cream Suit Another Cone, Despite Soft-Serve Allegations

Harris v. McDonald's Corporation, No. 3:20-cv-06533 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 24, 2021).

A California federal district court granted a supposed ice cream gastronome leave to amend her allegations that a worldwide burger chain falsely advertises its ice cream as "vanilla." The plaintiff alleged that the burger chain failed to disclose that its vanilla flavor comes from artificial vanilla instead of "exclusively or [predominantly]" from the natural vanilla plant. The district court dismissed these allegations, finding it was only conceivable—not plausible that a reasonable consumer would expect vanilla ice cream to contain no other flavoring than from vanilla beans.

Yet it was not a complete victory for the defendant. Despite its arguments that the ice cream actually contains vanilla (and even though the allegations are lodged against a fast-food restaurant, not an artisan creamery), the district court granted the plaintiff leave to replead her claims. The district court expressed discomfort with wielding the reasonable consumer standard and distinguished more amorphous ice cream flavors (like rocky road) with primary flavors like chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla. The court did caution, however, that the plaintiff must do more than simply offer her own personal views about what reasonable consumers might think about the defendant's labeling.

### Although Particularity Defense Sustained, Plaintiff Gets to Replead Sustainably-Sourced Suit

Walker v. Nestlé USA, No. 3:19-cv-00723 (S.D. Cal. Mar. 30, 2021).

In a carefully worded order, a California federal judge both granted a motion to dismiss yet left for another day the substance of a consumer's controversial allegations about a worldwide food company's sourcing practices. The consumer alleged that the defendant, one of the world's largest food companies and best known for its chocolate products, falsely advertised

itself as environmentally and socially responsible. According to the complaint, the defendant prominently features on its products that the cocoa in its chocolate is "sustainably sourced," that it "supports" and "helps improve the lives of cocoa farmers," and that it has implemented a "cocoa plan" to foster ethical sourcing practices. The plaintiff claims these representations are false because the defendant sources its cocoa from plantations in West Africa, which the plaintiff alleges employ pernicious—even abhorrent—labor and agricultural practices.

The district court avoided these allegations altogether, concluding instead that the plaintiff failed to allege which of the defendant's products she actually purchased. At the motion to dismiss stage, the district court reasoned, it was impossible to infer what labels the plaintiff saw and relied on and how they were presented on the defendant's labels. It granted the defendant's motion to dismiss, but granted the plaintiff leave to amend to specify the products she purchased and labels she relied on.

### Judge Sanitizes Sanitizer Lawsuit

Moreno v. Vi-Jon Inc., No. 3:20-cv-01446 (S.D. Cal. Mar. 3, 2021).

A California federal district court granted the plaintiffs leave to amend a proposed class action in a false labeling case against the manufacturers of Germ-X, finding that at this stage the plaintiffs "only pled a conjectural and hypothetical injury." The complaint claimed that the defendant's claims that the hand sanitizers protect against norovirus (which accounts for approximately 58% of food-related illness in the United States), protozoa, and bacterial spores were false and misleading because they do not work and because the product labels allegedly omit material information.

Despite these claims, the district court agreed with the defense's argument that a reasonable consumer wouldn't be misled by the labeling that the sanitizer "kills more than 99.99% of germs." An asterisk follows this statement alerting consumers that the hand sanitizers are "effective at eliminating 99.99% of many common harmful germs and bacteria in as little as 15 seconds," which the district court found only clarified consumer expectations from reading the front label. The district court observed that the plaintiff cannot read the label and then disregard the asterisk and disclaimer to claim he was misled. The district court also concluded that the plaintiff pushed an unreasonable interpretation of the label, observing that it was not plausible that that a reasonable consumer would be misled into thinking that the products would kill 99.99% of all germs. The court nevertheless granted the plaintiff leave to amend his allegations.







### Court Takes the High Road and Defers to FDA Primary Jurisdiction in CBD Case

Dasilva v. Infinite Product Co. LLC, No. 2:19-cv-10148 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 3, 2021).

In 2019, the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research sent a letter to the CEO of the defendant CBD company claiming that a host of CBD products—topical cream, healing oil, gummies, and even nondairy creamer—were unapproved new drugs or misbranded drugs in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The letter also asserted that statements on the defendant's website and social media platforms indicated medical uses for the CBD products despite lack of prior FDA approval and even though certain products may be considered adulterated human foods.

A consumer of those products subsequently filed a class action complaint, asserting claims under three California consumer protection statutes and claiming that he would have not purchased the CBD products or would have paid less for them if he had been aware of the misleading labeling. Following a recent trend, the court deferred to the FDA's primary jurisdiction. The court noted that the FDA had recently formed a task force, conducted a public hearing, and opened a public hearing period on CBD products. Further, the court guestioned how it could even adjudicate the plaintiff's claims in the first place given the lack of clarity on whether the products at issue should be considered drugs, dietary supplements, or food products. The court ultimately elected to stay the case pending the FDA's rulemaking process or until Congress passed legislation covering the definitions, marketing, and labeling of CBD products. Until then, the case will remain administratively closed.

# **Motion for Preliminary Injunction**

Procedural Posture: Granted

## Stop in the Name of ... Coffee and French Fries?

### California Chamber of Commerce v. Becerra, No. 2:19-cv-02019 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 29, 2021).

Our dear readers may recall the great acrylamide battles of years past, culminating in the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) taking coffee off California's Proposition 65 list of chemicals that are known to cause cancer or birth defects or other reproductive harm because the amount of acrylamide in coffee is too low to be a carcinogenic risk. But other foods containing acrylamide remained subject to that warning requirement. So the battle forged on. Leading the charge was the California Chamber of Commerce, which sued the state attorney general over the continued Prop. 65 warnings for products containing acrylamide. Siding with the California business group, the Central District of California issued a preliminary injunction enjoining the filing or prosecution of new lawsuits to enforce the Prop. 65 warning requirement for cancer due to acrylamide in food and beverage products while the suit is pending. The court applied the Zauderer

First Amendment test for compelled commercial speech to determine that requiring a Prop. 65 warning on food products containing acrylamide would not directly advance the governmental interest of protecting the health and safety of consumers because of the guestionable link between the acrylamide exposure from foods and cancer. A collective sigh was heard across the land.

## **Class Certification**

Procedural Posture: Granted

### Breakfast Biscuit Classes on Sugar High in Spite of Half-Baked Damages Model

### McMorrow v. Mondelēz International Inc., No. 3:17-cv-02327 (S.D. Cal. Mar. 8, 2021).

A California federal district court found that the plaintiffs in the belVita lawsuit met their burden to certify New York and California classes after they reportedly revised the damages model and addressed other concerns raised. The plaintiffs alleged that the defendant's belVita breakfast biscuits were falsely labeled as "nutritious" because they contained high amounts of added sugar that increased the risk of congenital heart defects, stroke, and other morbidities.

In March 2020, the district court denied class certification, taking issue with the proposed class's damages model. Then, the district court found that the damages model made no effort to track the plaintiffs' allegations regarding "nutritious" or isolate the damages and instead determined damages on a range of labels and slogans, such as "Nutritious Sustained Energy," "Nutritious Steady Energy All Morning" and "4 Hours of Nutritious Steady Energy," or no claims about energy.

Following the denial of class certification, the plaintiffs' expert revised the damages model purportedly to isolate and measure the price premium attached only to the term "nutritious" using market-based price points. Notably, the district court was undeterred by the defendant's arguments that the proposed damages model didn't account for the various possible interpretations of the term "nutritious" and that the model isn't anchored in realworld pricing data. Specifically, the court was not concerned that the plaintiff's damages model only accounted for consumers' willingness to pay and held supply constant (an economic no-no that cannot account for half of any market pricing model). Finally, the district court's predominance analysis glossed over materiality, observing only that the jury will make the ultimate determination of whether the term "nutritious" was material to a reasonable consumer.



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### Judge Takes Kindly to "All Natural" Class Certification Bid

### In re Kind LLC, No. 1:15-md-02645 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 24, 2021).

A federal court in New York certified three damages classes in multidistrict litigation alleging that Kind mislabels its snack bars. The consumers alleged that they were deceived by labels on a host of different Kind snack bars that described them as being "healthy" and made with "non-GMO" or "all-natural" ingredients when, according to the plaintiffs, they actually contain highly processed ingredients. The plaintiffs claimed they paid premium prices for the snack bars that they otherwise would not have paid. Certifying damages classes from New York, California, and Florida, the court reasoned that the differences between the labels of various Kind products were "slight" and, as a result, insufficient to defeat class certification. Against this backdrop, however, the judge declined to certify the injunctive relief class on the basis that consumers who allege they were deceived by labels in the past are unable to be deceived by those same labels in the future.

### Injunctive Relief Is Not Too Far-Fetched in Toxic Dog Food Case

Zeiger v. Wellpet LLC, No. 3:17-cv-04056 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 26, 2021).

A customer of a premium dog food brand brought a case alleging that the company misled customers by failing to disclose the presence of arsenic, lead, and bisphenol A (more commonly known as BPA) in its dog food. A federal district court recently permitted part of the case to continue as an injunctive relief class. The district court first found on a motion for summary judgment that the plaintiff had shown that there was a genuine issue of material fact about the safety of the levels of arsenic and lead in the dog food. Considering the expert testimony presented, the district court found that the plaintiff had submitted competent evidence to support his theory that lead and arsenic could "bioaccumulate" in dogs. The district court did not find, however, that the plaintiff had been able to show that the levels of BPA in the food presented any risk.

The district court also considered whether the plaintiff would be able to bring his case on behalf of similarly affected individuals in evaluating his motions for class certification. The court denied his motion to certify a class seeking damages, finding that the plaintiff relies only on an impermissible full refund model and did not proffer an admissible damages model. However, the court did permit him to move forward with a class seeking injunctive relief under Rule 23(b)(2) because the plaintiff's "open[ness] to" purchasing the defendant's products in the future and prospective nature of injunctive relief were sufficient at the class certification stage. The defendant has appealed the district court's order on the injunctive relief class to the Ninth Circuit.

# **Settlements**

### Sunny Days Ahead for Sunscreen Plaintiffs

### Prescott v. Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals Inc., No. 5:20-cv-00102 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 17, 2021).

Consumers had sued the makers of Coppertone branded sunscreen products, alleging that the products'"Mineral-Based" labels deceive consumers into believing that the products contain only mineral active ingredients when, in fact, they contain chemical active ingredients. The defendants moved to dismiss the action, which the federal district court denied.

Shortly after the district court's order, the parties settled their dispute for \$2.25 million. The defendants agreed to place the settlement proceeds into a fund to cover, among other things, payments to putative class members' claims for up to \$2.50 per product. Under the terms of the settlement agreement, the defendants also have discontinued the use of the term "Mineral-Based" on their product labels. The parties are now seeking preliminary approval of the agreement.

### Kona Farmers Grind Out Three Settlements in Coffee Dispute

Corker v. Costco Wholesale Corporation, No. 2:19-cv-00290 (W.D. Wash. Mar. 8, 2021).

As we first reported in the April 2019 edition of the Food & Beverage Digest, coffee farmers in the Kona region of Hawaii sued several suppliers and retailers of coffee, alleging that the companies violated the Lanham Act by misleadingly labeling coffee not from the Kona region as "Kona" coffee. The plaintiffs claimed that they and the members of the settlement class grow the world's supply of true Kona coffee and alleged they were economically harmed by the defendants' misleading labels.

In the midst of litigation and before filing a motion for class certification, the plaintiffs reached class settlements with three of the 24 named defendants and moved the district court to preliminarily approve the class settlements. In their motion, the plaintiffs argued that the settlements presented substantial monetary and injunctive relief, particularly since the settlements required the defendants to relabel their products and prevent further harm to the growers of legitimate Kona coffee. Curiously, only one of the three settlements included a monetary component, a \$6.1 million payment to the class. All three of the settlements included injunctive relief provisions that required the defendants to state on the labels of the product the percentage of Kona coffee used in the product.









### Plaintiffs Reel In \$1.3 Million Settlement from Seafood Company Labeling Suit

### Neversink General Store v. Mowi USA LLC, No. 1:20-cv-09293 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 16, 2021).

Mowi USA LLC has agreed to pay \$1.3 million to settle a proposed class action alleging that the company falsely marketed its Ducktrap River of Maine Atlantic salmon as sustainably sourced, all-natural, and Maine-caught. Based on the proposed settlement deal, buyers with proof of purchase will be able to recoup \$2.50 per package. In addition to those cash payments, Mowi also agreed to stop using the challenged labeling for at least two years. On the same day the proposed settlement agreement was filed, both parties filed oppositions to proposed intervenors who argued the lawsuit was a copycat of their own litigation against Mowi in D.C. Superior Court (and that the case was settled without any meaningful litigation).

### Will Purchasers "Move Free" to Cash In on \$53 Million Proposed Class Settlement?

Yamagata v. Reckitt Benckiser LLC, No. 3:17-cv-03529 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 29, 2021).

Reckitt Benckiser LLC, the maker of the Schiff "Move Free Advanced" glucosamine and chondroitin dietary supplements, recently agreed to a proposed settlement in a certified class action that claimed the company falsely advertised its supplements as treating joint pain. After languishing through four years of litigation, the parties mediated their way to a proposed nationwide class settlement valued at \$53 million. In that deal, class members were set to receive cash refunds for up to three purchases of the joint supplement for a total of \$66 without proof of purchase. Consumers able to provide proof of purchase were slated to receive a full refund for any purchases made from Reckitt, and if all the settlement funds were not claimed, the settlement would have provided an increase in up to three times the amount claimed for each member. Plaintiffs' counsel also flexed their muscles for a clear sailing settlement provision in the proposed settlement: Reckitt agreed not to oppose plaintiffs' counsel's request for up to \$12.5 million in attorneys' fees, representing 25% of the common fund, plus reimbursement of up to \$750,000 in reasonable litigation expenses. But the court said the parties' settlement was a stretch without more details on how certain refunds would be deducted from the common fund and denied the parties' motion for approval. As the proposed cy pres recipient, the Orthopedic Research Society is likely keeping its fingers crossed that the parties can cross the finish line on the next goround.

# Regulatory

### Updated Definition of "Healthy" in the Works

#### Department of Health and Human Services, Semiannual Regulatory Agenda (Mar. 31, 2021).

The FDA last defined the food labeling term "healthy"—an implied nutrient content claim over 30 years ago with a focus on total fats, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Under the current definition, foods high in fat, such as nuts, avocados, eggs, and salmon, may find it difficult to meet the definition's parameters. Acknowledging the changing nutrition science, in 2016 the FDA began requesting public comments to consider a new definition of "healthy" while also issuing an enforcement discretion policy for foods labeled "healthy" that (1) are not low in fat but have a fat profile of predominantly mono- and polyunsaturated fats; and (2) contain at least 10% of daily value per reference amounts customarily consumed (RACC) of vitamin D.

Now, almost five years since the FDA first requested comments, the agency is expected to issue a proposed rule "in the foreseeable future" to revise the definition of "healthy." Interested parties should continue to monitor for a release of a proposed rule.

# **Appeals**

### Advocacy Groups Lose Years-Long Game of Chicken over Standing

#### Friends of the Earth v. Sanderson Farms Inc., No. 19-16696 (9th Cir. Mar. 31, 2021).

What does it take for an advocacy group to establish organizational standing to challenge a food producer's labeling? According to the Ninth Circuit, more than "business as usual." Two public interest groups took issue with Sanderson Farms' alleged use of antibiotics in its chicken. Those advocacy groups published a negative report on Sanderson's antibiotic practices and linked to a New York Times article about Sanderson's defense of its antibiotic use on its Facebook page, while claiming Sanderson lagged behind many in the industry when it came to protecting animal well-being. The next year, the advocacy groups sued Sanderson under California's unfair competition and false advertising statutes for advertising its chicken products as 100% natural.

Sanderson moved to dismiss the mislabeling suit, raising a challenge to the groups' organizational standing. After allowing for substantial discovery on the standing issue, the district court dismissed. The Ninth Circuit affirmed that dismissal, explaining that to establish organizational standing, the advocacy groups would need to show that they "diverted resources" to combat the challenged practices. Only conduct that occurred between the time when the advocacy groups learned of the alleged misrepresentations and when they filed suit could be taken into consideration. However, once Sanderson's purportedly misleading advertisements were brought to the attention of the advocacy groups, they simply continued doing what they were already doing—publishing reports and informing



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the public of antibiotic practices. Significantly, the advocacy groups did not publish action alerts or press releases about the specific advertising at issue or petition Sanderson to stop the advertising. Thus, after nearly two years and mountains of discovery, the advocacy groups couldn't prove more than business as usual.

### Getting Up Close and Personal

Ford Motor Co. v. Montana Eighth Judicial District, No. 19-368 (U.S. Mar. 25, 2021).

The U.S. Supreme Court broadened the reach of specific personal jurisdiction for products liability cases, but litigants may seek to stretch its holding even to the food and beverage industry. Our colleagues Scott Elder and Omar Morquecho weighed in on the Supreme Court's opinion here.

Plaintiffs asserting consumer class actions asserting economic injuries in the form of a price premium may find less success with Justice Kagan's seemingly broader take on personal jurisdiction. It remains to be seen how the case will impact defendants that do not have a ubiquitous nationwide presence. It is even more uncertain whether a named plaintiff may certify classes of nonresident putative class members whose "harms" do not relate either to the defendant's forum-related conduct or even to the forum in the first instance. We expect defendants to continue to mount personal jurisdiction arguments based on Bristol-Myers Squibb until the Supreme Court provides courts and litigants the clarity they seek.

### **Checkout Lane**

Upcoming Events | Click or Scan for Details

#### Attendance Calories 0

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Knowledgeable Speakers	100%
Current Topics	100%
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#### May 5, 2021



Biden's First 100 Days: FDA/USDA Regulatory Developments Affecting the Food & Beverage and Agriculture Industries

In this one-hour webinar, Nowell Berreth, Angela Spivey, Kristi Boswell, and Sam Jockel of our Food, Beverage & Agribusiness Industry Team will explore the effects of key agency developments on food producers, ingredient suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers and preview agency action that may be on the horizon.

#### May 25, 2021



Angela Spivey will moderate the panel "Class Action Round-Up" at the 10th Annual Food & Supplements Workshop sponsored by the American Bar Association's Section of Litigation Products Liability Committee.

#### June 2, 2021



Bringing Food Products to Market – Part 2: Special Topics

In this 45-minute webinar presented by members of our Food & Beverage and FDA teams who served as FDA and USDA regulatory attorneys, Sam Jockel and Ben

Wolf break down what it takes to establish a suitable regulatory status for a number of products.







#### ABA 10th Annual Food & Supplements Workshop













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