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PRESS CONTACT

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Ben Lilliston, 612-870-3416, ben@iatp.org

Have a Happier Valentine's Day New Consumer Web Tool to Find Children's Foods & Candies Without Synthetic Dyes

Minneapolis – Approaching Valentine's Day, consumers are surrounded with candies and processed foods containing synthetic food dyes. Increasingly, these dyes have been found to increase hyperactivity and other disturbed behavior in children. Two new consumer tools from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) help parents make smart choices about foods not containing brain toxins.

"The latest science indicates that even modest amounts of synthetic food dyes can affect learning in children," said David Wallinga, M.D., Director of IATP's Food and Health program. "Parents shouldn't have to be chemists to find healthy food that helps growing brains. We can do better."

IATP's web-based Brain Food Selector™ (iatp.org/brainfoodselector) is a database that helps parents easily find which foods contain synthetic dyes. Parents can search by brand, product type or food dye. IATP's *Smart Guide to Food Dyes* describes why synthetic food dyes are used, associated children's health concerns and what parents can do.

Synthetic food dyes, mostly petroleum-derived, are unnecessary. FDA-approved uses for synthetic food dyes include: making foods more fun (e.g., Valentine's sprinkles or brightly colored candies); coloring for otherwise colorless foods (e.g., lime sherbet); and enhancing natural color. Synthetic food dyes are used in a number of foods such as Fruit Loops and popsicles, but also butter, the skins of fruit and the casings of hot dogs. Synthetic dyes are especially common in foods marketed to children, including candies, many foods, dressings, treats, and dipping sauces at fast food outlets.

The industrialization of the food system helps account for the increase in food additives such as food dyes, preservatives and sweeteners. The high degree of food processing, which exposes foods to high temperatures, light, air and moisture, leads to an increased loss of natural color. Post-processing, synthetic dyes are often added to offset color loss.

During the last three decades, repeated studies have concluded that modest doses of synthetic dyes added to foods can provoke hyperactivity and other disturbed behavior in children. In April 2008, Britain's Food Standards Agency advised the food industry to voluntarily ban the use of six common synthetic food dyes by 2009. Some companies now sell two versions of their products: one without synthetic food dyes for the UK, and a U.S. version that includes such dyes.

"The good news is that there are safer alternatives to synthetic food dyes and many food companies are already making the switch," said Dr. Wallinga. "We need the food industry and U.S. government agencies to catch up with the latest science and start protecting our children. Until then, parents need to be armed with information when they go shopping."

IATP works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.