Coconut Industry Campaigns to Remove Coconuts from “Top 8” Allergen List

On September 10, the Coconut Coalition of the Americas (CCA) launched a campaign to remove coconuts from the “top 8 allergen” list. As our readers likely know, the Food Allergen Labeling Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) to require the labeling of foods that contain the eight most common food allergens or ingredients derived from them. The eight most common allergens are: (1) milk; (2) eggs; (3) fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod); (4) Crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp); (5) tree nuts (e.g., almonds, pecans, walnuts); (6) wheat; (7) peanuts; and (8) soybeans. In guidance, FDA indicated coconuts are considered to be a “tree nut” and should therefore be declared by its common or usual name in a product’s allergen statement.

As part of the campaign, CCA plans to submit a citizen petition to FDA requesting that FDA revise the FALCPA guidance and remove coconut from the list of “tree nuts” identified as a major food allergen. According to CCA, coconut is not a major food allergen nor is it a nut. CCA cites The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology which states that “[c]oconut is not a botanical nut; it is classified as a fruit, even though the Food and Drug Administration recognizes coconut as a tree nut. While allergic reactions to coconut have been documented, most people who are allergic to tree nuts can safely eat coconut.” We note that the Food Allergy Research and Resource Program (FARRP) has stated some fruits are commonly considered to be nuts (e.g., coconut).

In a press release provided by the association, CCA Executive Director Len Monheit asserted that “[t]he FDA misclassified coconut, which is causing confusion for a lot of people because it shouldn’t be classified with tree nuts. Consumers with a tree nut allergy, but not a coconut allergy, are being deprived of this fruit. And, industry is being greatly impacted as contract manufacturers wanting to use coconut have to unnecessarily classify their facility as a tree nut facility when they’re not.”

As our readers may remember, in the fall of 2018, FDA announced that it is considering mandatory food labeling for sesame to help protect consumers with sesame allergies. However, FDA has not indicated any plans to reconsider whether coconut is a tree nut.