

Mayo Clinic

By Reg P. Wydeven
November 23, 2014

As Thanksgiving approaches this week, I'm reminded of how thankful I am for my family. I have an awesome wife, two terrific kids, great parents, wonderful in-laws, my amazing sister and her family, and my super sister-in-law and her family.

Fox example, every year my mom will make our favorite meal for our birthday. I get her homemade spaghetti and banana cream pie. My sister gets chicken and rice and chocolate cream pie. My dad gets BLTs and strawberry shortcake.

I almost feel like it's my birthday, too, though, because I also love her BLTs. My mom makes the perfect BLT: the bread is toasted just right, the bacon is crispy, the lettuce is crunchy and the tomatoes are juicy.

When I tried to make myself a BLT like my mom, I failed. It was close, but not quite right. She asked what kind of spread I used, and I said whatever mayonnaise we had in the fridge. My mom quickly admonished me and proclaimed that I can't use mayonnaise and instead use Kraft's Miracle Whip. I laughed and said that Miracle Whip is just one brand of mayonnaise. She quickly corrected me and said that Miracle Whip is not mayonnaise.

Foolishly I doubted her and looked it up. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, to be called mayonnaise, a product must contain one or more "egg yolk-containing ingredients" and be at least 65% vegetable oil. Because Miracle Whip does not meet these standards, it's technically classified as salad dressing.

And it's because of these standards that Unilever, the company that manufactures Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise, recently sued Hampton Creek, the maker of Just Mayo.

Unilever is accusing the startup company, funded by the likes of Bill Gates, of false advertising because Just Mayo contains no egg, so it's not mayonnaise. Just Mayo is a vegan product that's made from yellow peas. According to Just Mayo's website, the spread is "outrageously delicious, better for your body, for your wallet, and for the planet."

According to the suit, filed in federal court in New Jersey, the marketing of the "Just Mayo false name" has "caused consumer deception and serious, irreparable harm to Unilever." Unilever further claims that calling the eggless spread Just Mayo is "part of a larger campaign and pattern of unfair competition by Hampton Creek to falsely promote Just Mayo spread as tasting better than, and being superior to, Best Foods and Hellmann's mayonnaise."

The lawsuit alleges that the marketing campaign has caused Hellmann's and other mayonnaise manufacturers harm that is "impossible to quantify because of the difficulty of measuring lost good will and sales." Accordingly, Unilever is seeking unspecified compensatory damages and is demanding that Just Mayo change its label which features an egg.

Hampton Creek counters that it never actually called its product "mayonnaise" – just "mayo." CEO Josh Tetrick believes Unilever is feeling threatened because Just Mayo is "competing directly with a company that hasn't had real competition in decades." Celebrity chef Andrew Zimmern started an online petition to ask Unilever to drop the lawsuit and "Stop Bullying Sustainable Food Companies." The petition currently has over 15,000 signatures.

Personally, I'm more concerned about how something tastes rather than what it's called. Although I'll admit, "Just Yellow Peas" doesn't sound too appetizing. Have a happy and blessed Thanksgiving.