

# High oleic acid cooking oil awarded heart healthy claim

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Brief

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Dive Brief:

- In response to a petition from Corbion Biotech, Inc., the U.S. Food and Drug Administration decided to allow two qualified health claims on edible oils containing oleic acid. The agency said in a statement last week that it determined there is "credible evidence to support a qualified health claim that consuming oleic acid in edible oils, such as olive oil, sunflower oil, or canola oil, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease."
- The agency's determination means certain olive, canola, safflower, soybean, sunflower and algal oils containing at least 70% oleic acid can be labeled as conveying cardiovascular benefits when substituted for fats and oils higher in saturated fats.
- Since these are FDA "qualified" health claims – not "authorized" health claims, which meet a more rigorous scientific standard – products must also have a disclaimer to let consumers know the level of scientific evidence is "supportive but not conclusive."

## Dive Insight:

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Being able to cite qualified health claims on product packaging could bring a significant competitive boost to manufacturers like Corbion, whose TerraVia subsidiary makes Thrive Culinary Algae Oil. Thrive contains more monounsaturated fat than any other cooking oil — 13 grams in one tablespoon — which is approximately 25% more than olive oil or avocado oil. It is also vegan, contains no trans fats and has a higher-than-normal smoke point, [Food Navigator reported](#).

Heart health is the top wellness claim consumers look for when grocery shopping, [according to data from The Hartman Group](#). That research found 55% of U.S. consumers try to avoid or reduce saturated fat in their diets, and about 40% try to consume healthier fats — such as polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats — instead of saturated ones.

In the past, many healthier oils could only be used [in cold products like dressings and condiments](#), but their stability has been improved with new technologies so manufacturers may now use them in fried and baked foods. These oils include non-GMO soy, canola and corn oils — with higher levels of heart-healthy monounsaturated fatty acids — and high-oleic oils, which have a fatty acid composition that makes them more heat-stable and less prone to oxidation than conventional oils.

Makers of high-oleic acid oils will now be able to include a qualified health claim on their label that reads "supportive but not conclusive scientific evidence suggests that daily consumption of about 1½ tablespoons (20 grams) of oils containing high levels of oleic acid, may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease."

Manufacturers will also need to make it clear that these oils "should replace fats and oils higher in saturated fat and not increase the total number of calories you eat in a day" to achieve cardiovascular health benefits.

To reach its determination, the FDA analyzed seven small clinical studies looking at the relationship between consuming high-oleic oils and improved cholesterol levels, which indicates a reduced risk for coronary heart disease. [According to a statement from Commissioner Scott Gottlieb](#), six of the studies found participants randomly assigned to consume diets containing high-oleic oils experienced slightly lower cholesterol compared to those who ate a more Western-style diet that was high in saturated fat. The seventh showed no significant effect, he added.

"Importantly, and as noted in the health claim, none of the studies found that eating oleic acid-containing oils had beneficial heart effects unless they replaced other types of fats and oils higher in saturated fats in the diet," Gottlieb said.

The [FDA approved a similar petition](#) from Bunge North America last year, which permitted a qualified heart-healthy claim on soybean oil labels. Food companies and restaurants are now allowed to use that claim on products with soybean oil as an ingredient — including bottled oil, salad dressings, dips, snacks and baked goods.

As long as food makers don't start putting a heart-healthy claim on products like potato chips fried in soybean or algal oil — thereby potentially weakening its value — consumers might start to pay more attention to these labels and choose the heart-healthy product over another one without such a claim.

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