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13	UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA		
14	CENTRAL DISTR	ICT OF CALIFORNIA	
15	NATASHA PARACHA, and	Case No.: 2:18-cv-07659	
	MORGAN STECKLER, On Behalf of		
16	Themselves and All Others Similarly Situated,	FIRST AMENDED CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT FOR:	
17	Situated,		
18	Plaintiffs,	1. VIOLATION OF THE UNFAIR	
19	V.	COMPETITION LAW, Business and Professions Code §17200 <i>et seq.</i> ; and	
20	V.	2. VIOLATION OF THE	
21	GENERAL MILLS, INC., a Delaware	CONSUMERS LEGAL REMEDIES	
22	Corporation	ACT, Civil Code §1750 et seq.	
23	Defendant.	DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL	
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First Amended Class Action Complaint

state:

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

1. Defendant manufactures, markets, sells, and distributes various food products. This lawsuit concerns four of those products: Cheerios Toasted Whole Grain Oat Cereal, Nature Valley Granola Protein Oats n' Honey, Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars – Oat's n' Honey, and Lucky Charms (the "Products").

themselves and all others similarly situated against Defendant General Mills, Inc. and

Plaintiffs Natasha Paracha and Morgan Steckler bring this action on behalf of

- 2. In marketing its Products, Defendant seeks to appeal to the consuming public's ever-growing health consciousness and increasing appetite for nutritious, wholesome foods that will benefit their health and avoidance of highly-processed foods with non-healthy attributes such as GMOs, artificial additives, gluten, added sugars, and hydrogenated oils.
- 3. Defendant makes several detailed representations about the health attributes of its Products on the front of the Product packages. For example, Defendant represents on the front of each and every Cheerios Toasted Whole Grain Oat Cereal Product that the Product is "made with 100% whole grain oats", "can help lower cholesterol" and "may reduce the risk of heart disease", is "simply made" and "Gluten Free", contains "NO artificial flavors [or] colors", and the "1st Ingredient [is] whole grain oats". Further, on the top of the box, which consumers see when they pick the Product up off of the shelf and continue to see every time they eat Cheerios, Defendant represents in all capital letters against a white background on an otherwise yellow box that the "FIRST INGREDIENT [is] WHOLE GRAIN" and that "A WHOLE GRAIN FOOD IS MADE BY USING ALL THREE PARTS OF THE GRAIN. ALL GENERAL MILLS BIG G CEREALS CONTAIN MORE WHOLE

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Plaintiff reserves the right to add additional products upon completion of discovery.

- 4. The Product Health Representations lead reasonable consumers to believe the Products will foster their "good health" and not pose a safety risk to or potentially harm their health.
- 5. However, recent testing by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting human health and the environment, revealed that Defendant's Products contain glyphosate, one of the most widely used weed killing poisons in the United States. EWG's Children's Health Initiative, "Breakfast With a Dose of Roundup?" August 15, 2018, available at https://www.ewg.org/childrenshealth/glyphosateincereal/#.W3TTbPZFw2w ("EWG") (last visited August 23, 2018). Each year, more than 250 million pounds of glyphosate is sprayed on American crops, including wheat, barley, and oats just before they are harvested. *Id.* Glyphosate adheres to the crops and Defendant's cleansing process fails to remove the glyphosate residue.
- 6. The EWG's glyphosate findings confirm the results of a study published in 2016 by the nonprofit Food Democracy Now that found glyphosate in Defendant's Cheerios Toasted Whole Grain Oat Cereal Product. *See* Glyphosate: Unsafe on Any Plate, Food Testing Results and Scientific Reasons for Concern, at p. 5, *available at* https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.fooddemocracynow.org/images/FDN\_Glyphosate \_FoodTesting\_Report\_p2016.pdf (last visited August 27, 2018).
- 7. The International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the World Health Organization, has determined that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic to

- humans". IARC Monographs Volume 112: evaluation of five organophosphate insecticides and herbicides, March 20, 2015, *available at* http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographVolume112.pdf (last visited August 23, 2018). Glyphosate is even more dangerous for children, who are more susceptible to carcinogens. *See* EWG.
- 8. Recently, Defendant announced that it will drop the "100% Natural" representation it makes on its Nature Valley Crunch Granola Bars Oats n' Honey Product as the Product contains glyphosate. *See* https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-23/nature-valley-drops-100-natural-claim-after-pesticide-suit (last visited August 27, 2018). Defendant has not, however, indicated it will disclose the presence of glyphosate on any of the Product packages.
- 9. Because it is a probable carcinogen with no nutritional value, the presence of *any* amount of glyphosate in the Products, no matter whether above or below regulatory limits, is material to reasonable consumers. No reasonable consumer would purchase the Products knowing that they contained glyphosate.
- 10. Even though Defendant has acknowledged that Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars Oats n' Honey Product contains the probable carcinogen glyphosate and knew that the other Products contain glyphosate or, at a minimum, that it could not guarantee the Products did not contain glyphosate given its wide use as a pesticide, Defendant does not disclose this information on the front of the Product labels, choosing instead to specifically identify only the healthy attributes of its Products. Nor does Defendant include this information on the back or sides of the packages, where more detailed Product information is generally found, instead choosing to repeat and reinforce the Healthy Representations on the front of the packages. In fact, nowhere on its Product packages inside or out does Defendant disclose that the Products contain or likely contain the probable carcinogen

- 11. As the manufacturer and distributor of the Products, Defendant knew that the Products contained or likely contained glyphosate. By contrast, Plaintiffs and consumers did not and do not have access to such information. Nor is that fact easily discovered by Plaintiffs and consumers before purchase of the Products. Because Defendant had knowledge that the Products contain or likely contain glyphosate, and Plaintiffs and consumers did not, Defendant had a duty to disclose that fact—and that glyphosate is a probable carcinogen—to consumers. Defendant did not disclose these material facts.
- 12. Consumers have a reasonable expectation that material product information, such as the presence of a probable carcinogen like glyphosate, will be provided by a product manufacturer, especially when the manufacturer prominently features and affirmatively identifies the health-related attributes of its Products such as "Gluten Free", "100% Whole Grain", and "NO Artificial Flavors [or] Colors". By only identifying the healthy attributes of its Products, emphasizing its Products are made using all three parts of the grain, and failing to disclose that the Products contain or likely contain glyphosate and glyphosate is a probable carcinogen, Defendant actively concealed this information from Plaintiffs, Class members, and the general public. *See* representative Product labels, attached hereto as Exhibit A.
- 13. Defendant had a duty to disclose that the Products contain or likely contain glyphosate and that glyphosate is a probable carcinogen, which was known to Defendant and unknown and/or not reasonably accessible to Plaintiffs and consumers, on its Product labels where the disclosure could be viewed by Plaintiffs and consumers at the point-of-sale.
- 14. By failing to disclose that the Products contain or likely contain glyphosate and glyphosate is a probable carcinogen and continuing to sell the

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deceive and mislead consumers, including Plaintiffs. As a result of Defendant's false and deceptive Product Health 15. Representations, misleading half-truths and material nondisclosures, consumers will

Products in packages omitting this information, Defendant has and continues to

continue to purchase Defendant's Products that, unbeknownst to them, contain or

likely contain glyphosate.

16. Plaintiffs bring this action on behalf of themselves and other similarly situated consumers who purchased the Products to halt the dissemination of this misleading and deceptive advertising message, correct the misleading perception it has created in the minds of consumers, and obtain redress for those who have purchased the Products. Based on violations of California unfair competition laws (detailed below), Plaintiffs seek declaratory, injunctive, and restitutionary relief for consumers who purchased the Products.

# JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- This Court has original jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1332(d)(2). 17. The matter in controversy, exclusive of interest and costs, exceeds the sum or value of \$5,000,000 and is a class action in which there are in excess of 100 Class members and some members of the Class are citizens of a state different from Defendant.
- 18. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant is authorized to conduct and do business in California, including this District. Defendant marketed, promoted, distributed, and sold the Products in California, and Defendant has sufficient minimum contacts with this State and/or sufficiently availed itself of the markets in this State through its promotion, sales, distribution, and marketing within this State, including this District, to render the exercise of jurisdiction by this Court permissible.
- Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§1391(a) and (b) because a substantial part of the events giving rise to Plaintiffs Paracha and Steckler's

claims occurred while they resided in this judicial district. Venue is also proper under 18 U.S.C. §1965(a) because Defendant transacts substantial business in this District.

## **PARTIES**

- Plaintiff Natasha Paracha resides in Los Angeles County, California. 20. Throughout the relevant period, Plaintiff Paracha routinely was exposed to, saw, and relied upon Defendant's Product Health Representations by reading the Cheerios Toasted Whole Grain Oat Cereal Product label at various stores in Walnut, California, including Vons and Stater Bros. Plaintiff Paracha purchased the Product for herself, her two young children, and her father for approximately \$4/box. At all relevant times, Plaintiff was unaware that the Product contained glyphosate, that glyphosate was a probable carcinogen, or that Defendant could not guarantee it did not contain glyphosate. Had Defendant disclosed on the package that the Product contained or may contain glyphosate, and that glyphosate was a probable carcinogen, Plaintiff Paracha would have seen and read that disclosure and would not have purchased the Product. As a result, Plaintiff Paracha suffered injury in fact and lost money at the time of purchase. Plaintiff Paracha continues to desire to purchase General Mills products with healthy attributes that do not contain glyphosate, and she would purchase such a product manufactured by Defendant if it were possible to determine prior to purchase whether the Product contained or could contain glyphosate. Indeed, Plaintiff Paracha regularly visits stores such as Vons and Stater Bros, where Defendant's products are sold, but will be unable to rely upon the Product Health Representations and will not be able to determine if the Product still contains glyphosate when deciding whether to purchase the Product in the future.
- 21. Plaintiff Morgan Steckler resides in Los Angeles County, California. Throughout the relevant period, Plaintiff Steckler routinely was exposed to, saw, and relied upon Defendant's Product Health Representations by reading the Nature's Valley Crunchy Granola Bars Oats n' Honey Product label at various stores in the

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Los Angeles, California area, including Costco and Smart & Final. Plaintiff Steckler purchased the Product for himself and his wife. At all relevant times, Plaintiff Steckler was unaware that the Product contained glyphosate, that glyphosate was a probable carcinogen, or that Defendant could not guarantee it did not contain glyphosate. Had Defendant disclosed on the package that the Product contained or may contain glyphosate and that glyphosate was a probable carcinogen, Plaintiff Steckler would have seen and read that disclosure and would not have purchased the Product. As a result, Plaintiff Steckler suffered injury in fact and lost money at the time of purchase. Plaintiff Steckler continues to desire to purchase General Mills products with healthy attributes that do not contain glyphosate, and he would purchase such a product manufactured by Defendant if it were possible to determine prior to purchase whether the Product contained or could contain glyphosate. Indeed, Plaintiff Steckler regularly visits stores such as Costco and Smart and Final, where Defendant's products are sold, but will be unable to rely upon the Product Health Representations and will not be able to determine if the Product still contains glyphosate when deciding whether to purchase the Product in the future.

22. Defendant General Mills, Inc. is a Delaware corporation whose headquarters is located at Number One General Mills Blvd, Minneapolis, MN 55426. General Mills, Inc. manufactures, advertises, markets, distributes, and/or sells the Cheerios Toasted Whole Grain Oat Cereal, Nature Valley Granola Protein Oats n' Honey, Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars – Oats n' Honey, and Lucky Charms Products to tens of thousands of consumers in California and throughout the United States.

## **CLASS DEFINITION AND ALLEGATIONS**

23. Plaintiffs bring this action on behalf of themselves and all other similarly situated consumers pursuant to Rule 23(a), (b)(2), and (b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and seek certification of the following Class:

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1 **Multi-State Class Action** All consumers who, within the applicable statute of limitations 2 period until the date notice is disseminated, purchased the Products 3 in California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Washington.<sup>2</sup> 4 5 Excluded from this Class are Defendant and its officers. directors, employees and those who purchased the Products 6 for the purpose of resale. 7 8 24. In the alternative to a Multi-State Class, Plaintiffs seek certification of 9 the following California-Only Class: 10 California-Only Class Action 11 All California consumers who within the applicable statute of limitations period until the date notice is disseminated, purchased the Products. 12 13 Excluded from this Class are Defendant and its officers, directors and employees, and those who purchased the 14 Products for the purpose of resale. 15 16 25. **Numerosity**. The members of the Classes are so numerous that joinder 17 of all members of the Classes is impracticable. Plaintiffs are informed and believe 18 that the proposed Classes contain thousands of purchasers of the Products who have 19 been damaged by Defendant's conduct as alleged herein. The precise number of 20 Class members is unknown to Plaintiffs. 21 26.

26. Existence and Predominance of Common Questions of Law and Fact. This action involves common questions of law and fact, which predominate

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The States in the Multistate Class are limited to those States with similar consumer fraud laws as applied to the facts of this case: California (Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §17200, et seq.); Florida (Fla. Stat. §501.201, et seq.); Illinois (815 Ill. Comp. Stat. 502/1, et seq.); Massachusetts (Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 93A, et seq.); Michigan (Mich. Comp. Laws §445.901, et seq.); Minnesota (Minn. Stat. §325F.67, et seq.); Missouri (Mo. Rev. Stat. 010, et seq.); New Jersey (N.J. Stat. §56:8-1, et seq.); New York (N.Y. Gen. Bus. Law §349, et seq.); and Washington (Wash. Rev. Code §19.86.010, et seq.). These statutes are referred to as "Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes."

(a) whether Defendant's alleged conduct is unlawful;

- (b) whether the alleged conduct constitutes violations of the laws asserted;
- (c) whether Defendant engaged in false, misleading and/or deceptive advertising; and
- (d) whether Plaintiffs and Class members are entitled to appropriate remedies, including restitution and injunctive relief.
- 27. **Typicality.** Plaintiffs' claims are typical of the claims of the members of the Classes because, *inter alia*, all Class members were injured through the uniform misconduct described above. Plaintiffs are also advancing the same claims and legal theories on behalf of themselves and all Class members.
- 28. **Adequacy of Representation.** Plaintiffs will fairly and adequately protect the interests of Class members. Plaintiffs have retained counsel experienced in complex consumer class action litigation, and Plaintiffs intend to prosecute this action vigorously. Plaintiffs have no adverse or antagonistic interests to those of the Classes.
- 29. **Superiority.** A class action is superior to all other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy. The damages or other financial detriment suffered by individual Class members is relatively small compared to the burden and expense that would be entailed by individual litigation of their claims against Defendant. It would thus be virtually impossible for members of the Classes, on an individual basis, to obtain effective redress for the wrongs done to them. Furthermore, even if Class members could afford such individualized litigation, the court system could not. Individualized litigation would create the danger of inconsistent or contradictory judgments arising from the same set of facts. Individualized litigation would also increase the delay and expense to all parties and

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the court system from the issues raised by this action. By contrast, the class action device provides the benefits of adjudication of these issues in a single proceeding, economies of scale, and comprehensive supervision by a single court, and presents no unusual management difficulties under the circumstances here.

- 30. Plaintiffs seek preliminary and permanent injunctive and equitable relief on behalf of the entire Classes, on grounds generally applicable to the entire Classes, to enjoin and prevent Defendant from engaging in the acts described, and requiring Defendant to provide full restitution to Plaintiffs and Class members.
- 31. Unless a Class is certified, Defendant will retain monies received as a result of its conduct that were taken from Plaintiffs and Class members.
- Unless an injunction is issued, Defendant will continue to commit the 32. violations alleged, and the members of the Classes and the general public will continue to be deceived and not know whether the Product Health Representations are true or if the Products continue to contain glyphosate.

#### **COUNT I**

Violation of Business & Professions Code §17200, et seq. and Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes, supra note 2 (On Behalf of the Multi-State or California-Only Class)

- Plaintiffs repeat and re-allege the allegations contained in the 33. paragraphs above, as if fully set forth herein.
  - Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the Classes. 34.
- As alleged herein, Plaintiffs have suffered injury in fact and lost money 35. or property at the time of purchase as a result of Defendant's conduct because they purchased Defendant's Products in reliance on Defendant's Product Health Representations. Had Defendant disclosed on the packages that the Products contained or may contain the probable carcinogen glyphosate, Plaintiffs would have seen and read that disclosure and would not have purchased the Products.

- 36. The Unfair Competition Law, Business & Professions Code §17200, *et seq.* ("UCL") prohibits any "unlawful," "fraudulent," or "unfair" business act or practice and any false or misleading advertising. The Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes likewise prohibit the use of unfair or deceptive practices in the course of trade or commerce, and are to be liberally construed.
  - 37. In the course of conducting business, Defendant committed "unlawful" business practices by, *inter alia*, making the Product Health Representations, which are false and deceptive representations and misleading half-truths, and the material omissions (which also constitute advertising within the meaning of §17200) regarding the Products' labeling, as set forth more fully herein, and violating Civil Code §§ 1552, 1573, 1709, and 1711, the California Legal Remedies Act, Civil Code § 1750, *et seq.*, Business & Professions Code §§ 17200, *et seq.* and 17500, *et seq.*, the Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes, and the common law.
  - 38. Plaintiffs reserve the right to allege other violations of law, which constitute other unlawful business acts or practices. Such conduct is ongoing and continues to this date.
  - 39. In the course of conducting business, Defendant committed "unfair" business acts or practices by, *inter alia*, making the Product Health Representations, which are false and deceptive representations and misleading half-truths, and material omissions (which also constitute advertising within the meaning of § 17200) regarding the Products' labeling, as set forth more fully herein. There is no societal benefit from false advertising, only harm. While Plaintiffs and the public at large were and continue to be harmed, Defendant has been unjustly enriched by its misleading half-truths and material omissions. Because the utility of Defendant's conduct (zero) is outweighed by the gravity of harm to Plaintiffs, consumers, and the competitive market, Defendant's conduct is "unfair" having offended an established public policy. Further, Defendant engaged in immoral, unethical, oppressive, and

- 40. There were reasonable available alternatives to further Defendant's legitimate business interests, other than the conduct described herein.
- 41. In the course of conducting business, Defendant committed "fraudulent business act[s] or practices" and deceptive or misleading advertising by, *inter alia*, making the Product Health Representations, which are false and deceptive representations and misleading half-truths, and the material omissions (which also constitutes advertising within the meaning of §17200) regarding the Products as set forth more fully herein.
- 42. Defendant's actions, claims, and misleading statements, as more fully set forth above, are misleading and/or likely to deceive the consuming public within the meaning of Business & Professions Code §17200, *et seq.* and the Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes.
- 43. Plaintiffs relied on Defendant's Product Health Representations and were in fact injured as a result of those false and misleading representations and misleading half-truths and material omissions. Plaintiffs have suffered injury in fact and lost money as a result of their purchases of Defendant's Products.
- 44. Unless restrained and enjoined, Defendant will continue to engage in the above described conduct. Accordingly, injunctive relief is appropriate.
- 45. Plaintiffs, on behalf of themselves all others similarly situated, and the general public, seek declaratory relief and an injunction prohibiting Defendant from continuing such practices, restitution of all money obtained from Plaintiffs and the members of the Classes collected as a result of unfair competition, and all other relief this Court deems appropriate, consistent with Business & Professions Code § 17203 and the Similar Consumer Fraud Statutes.

# COUNT II Violations of the Consumers Legal Remedies Act – Civil Code § 1750 et seq.

# (On Behalf of the California-Only Class)

- 46. Plaintiffs repeat and re-allege the allegations contained in the paragraphs above, as if fully set forth herein.
- 47. Plaintiffs bring this claim individually and on behalf of the California-Only Class.
- 48. This cause of action is brought pursuant to the Consumers Legal Remedies Act, California Civil Code § 1750, *et seq.* (the "Act").
- 49. Plaintiffs are consumers as defined by California Civil Code § 1761(d). The Products are "goods" within the meaning of the Act.
- 50. Defendant violated and continues to violate the Act by engaging in the following practices proscribed by California Civil Code § 1770(a) in transactions with Plaintiffs and the California-Only Class which were intended to result in, and did result in, the sale of the Products:
  - (5) Representing that [the Products have] . . . characteristics, . . . uses [and] benefits . . . which [they do] not have . . .

\* \* \*

- (7) Representing that [the Products] are of a particular standard, quality, or grade ... if they are of another.
- 51. Defendant violated the Act by making the Product Health Representations, which are false and deceptive representations and misleading half-truths, and the material omissions, as described above, when it knew or should have known that the false and misleading representations and misleading half-truths and material omissions were misleading and deceptive.
- 52. Pursuant to California Civil Code § 1782(d), Plaintiffs and the California-Only Class seek a Court Order declaring Defendant to be in violation of the CLRA, enjoining the above-described wrongful acts and practices of Defendant, and ordering restitution and disgorgement.

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First Amended Class Action Complaint

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE** I hereby certify that on October 19, 2018, I electronically filed the foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system which will send notification of such filing to the e-mail addresses denoted on the Electronic Mail notice list, and I hereby certify that I have mailed the foregoing document or paper via the United States Postal Service to the non-CM/ECF participants indicated on the Manual Notice list. I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed the 19th day of October 2018. /s/Patricia N. Syverson Patricia N. Syverson - 16 -

First Amended Class Action Complaint