



Chip competitors can't stop Chester



SHANNON HALBROOK
ASST. OPINION EDITOR

It should've been obvious something was wrong when blood started showing up on the wheels of Chester Cheeta's skateboard.

Two weeks ago, the Department of Justice began investigating Frito-Lay in an attempt to settle suspicions that the company possesses too much of the snack-foods market.

The company's share of the valuable market is bigger than ever — 50 percent, according to a recent Time article. Frito-Lay has always brought standbys like Doritos, Fritos, Lay's and Ruffles to barbecues and family reunions nationwide. Now the company has added low-fat, baked chips to its line. My dad chomps them by the bag.

After reading the article, I wondered whether the government's investigation was justified. I couldn't think of many chips that weren't made by Frito-Lay, so, in an effort to find out, I went to the store to find a bag of chips without the company's name on it.

I focused on chips I'd never heard of. First, I grabbed a bag of Santitas Tortilla Chips, which by the bag looked like they were made in some poor pueblo in Chihuahua. But on the back was the Frito-Lay logo.

My next try was a bag of sour cream-flavored Baken-Ets Pork Skins. Surely they couldn't be Frito-Lay, I thought. But they were.

After I checked the entire aisle, I eventually found only three brands of chips not associated with Frito-Lay — the store's generic brand, El Galindo tortilla chips and a tiny row of Poore Brothers potato chips.

This poor selection, coupled with the fact that I had never heard of any of Frito-Lay's "competitors," convinced me that the government's investigation is justified.

In 1991, Frito-Lay shuffled off its main competitor, Anheuser-Busch's Eagle Snacks, by simply chomping it up. But lots of independent, mostly regional snack companies have been drummed completely out of business by Frito-Lay. And by the looks of things, some others aren't far behind.

The trouble with Frito-Lay's

incredible popularity is that, in essence, it has merely done what a good business should — made money and invested it shrewdly.

Because of its incredible profits, Frito-Lay has the money to develop more sophisticated production techniques. The company is now improving the efficiency of its potato peeling operation; experiments are being done with microwaves and lasers. It's obvious by their family name that the Poore Brothers don't have the cash for this kind of science-fiction experimentation.

Frito-Lay can also spend some of its profits on advertising. The only non-Frito-Lay chip with ads on TV is Pringles — which are good, but the commercials are so ridiculously stupid they almost force you to leave the chips on the shelf.

The trouble with completely unrestricted capitalism, as indicated by Frito-Lay's bout with the Justice Department, is that somebody eventually wins. Competition doesn't last forever because one company always gets ahead. As a result, the company can do what Frito-Lay has done — invest in its own growth — and soon it's a behemoth, able to either buy all its competitors or drive them into bankruptcy. Frito-Lay, in fact, is capable of bullying other snacks by stocking up on grocers' expensive shelf space.

Surprisingly, though, Frito-Lay seems to be fairly cooperative in the investigation. Sean Orr, Frito-Lay's senior vice president and chief financial advisor, told Time that the government has the "right to investigate us or anybody like us anytime they want." This is an admirable and rare attitude for a company executive.

Unfortunately, what the government should do is tough to say. Frito-Lay is just flat-out better than its competitors. Its chips are popular because they taste good. That's all there is to it. Consumers can't be expected to stop buying Frito-Lay's chips because of the company's large share of the market.

But if Frito-Lay's share of the market continues to increase, the company might soon achieve something dangerously close to a monopoly of the entire snack-foods industry, enabling them to fix prices and block competition. Already, Frito-Lay is literally forcing other snack foods off the shelf. Hit-and-runs by Chester Cheeta may not be far behind.

Shannon Halbrook is a Class of '98 English major

Regents' behavior embarrasses A&M

The actions of the Board of Regents are placed under a surprising amount of scrutiny. It is, after all, a group whose individual members are fairly unknown to students.



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dently in an effort to avoid future scandal.

One of the best ways for the Board — and all Aggies in general — to hone judgment is to constantly consider the question answered above: What exactly does A&M stand for?

A&M doesn't stand for alcohol and misappropriations. Last week Vickie Running, the executive secretary to the Board of Regents, pleaded no contest to a records tampering charge. By doing so, she helped to sweep an uncomfortable little episode under the rug.

The regents were illegally using state funds to purchase liquor. Running falsified documents by claiming that the items purchased were "soft drinks, food, cups and ice." She also tried to misrepresent the account used to pay for liquor.

After Running was sentenced to probation with deferred adjudication, Regents Chairman Mary Nan West and Chancellor Barry Thompson issued a statement saying "The Texas A&M University System is pleased that after a very short period of informal supervision, all alleged charges against Ms. Vickie Running ... will be dismissed. We are glad that this unfortunate episode is at an end."

And what a shame that it ends there. Although Running's actions were undoubtedly criminal, it seems unfair that she ultimately will absorb all of the blame for her bosses' actions. The regents were bending their elbows, but it is Vickie Running who got bent over the barrel.

A&M doesn't stand for airplanes and Margraves. Former Regents Chairman Ross Margraves Jr. was indicted on April 30 on charges of official misconduct. He is scheduled to attend his first pretrial hearing on June 25.

Margraves used an A&M airplane to fly himself and his wife to Baton Rouge on August 4, 1993. He justified his use of the state-owned plane by claiming that since he had been invited to sit on the platform and address the graduating class of Louisiana State University, his trip amounted to official business.

The suspicion of misconduct arises because Margraves' son was one of the graduating Tigers. Prudence dictates that Margraves could have avoided the appearance of impropriety by traveling to Baton Rouge at his own expense, since his son's graduation added a distinctly personal interest in the trip.

A&M doesn't stand for assumption and misunderstanding. Last month the Board of Regents Committee on Academic Campuses voted three-to-one to reject a proposal to create a Center for the Humanities.

The petitioning entity, the Interdisciplinary Group for Historical Literary Study (IGHLS), is a nationally lauded collection of professors engaged in highly regarded humanities research projects.

Despite the fact that the proposed Center would require no additional University funds and would actually attract money from outside sources, the regents rejected the proposal, citing concern that the group might en-

gage in "revisionist history".

Nothing in the eight year history of the IGHLS suggested revisionist tendencies. But since some similar organizations at other universities have been accused of trying to recreate history in a politically correct light, the regents assumed that a Center for the Humanities at A&M might try to fictionalize the past.

It is also difficult to understand why the Board dismissed the proposal of a group that has received praise from individual regents.

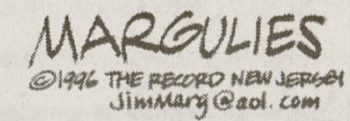
While the rejection involves neither admitted nor alleged misconduct, it is a judgment that many feel is an affront to academic freedom.

Furthermore, the rejection has caused outside observers to ask why the Board seems reluctant to award and encourage some of the University's most motivated faculty.

In fairness to the regents, some of these matters have yet to be resolved. Also, public opinion is swayed more quickly by bad news than good news.

But this is precisely why the Board needs to exercise every measure of caution to prevent further accusations. The three incidents that have been reported or remembered in the last month are enough to shake anyone's confidence in the Board of Regents. It is time for the Board to take positive action to reaffirm what it — and A&M — stands for.

Jeremy Valdez is a Class of '96 chemical engineering major



MAIL CALL

Physical Plant fails to understand drought

In the article, "Physical Plant cuts water use," in the June 12 Battalion, Charles Sippial is quoted as saying that "In essence, from groundwater, there is not a drought." Is he trying to convince the reader that the drought has little or no effect on the aquifer? How does he believe the water gets into the aquifer — leprechauns? He is further quoted as saying, "The only thing that has happened to that aquifer is that the level has been lowered." Yes, that is the point. The University pumps water from the aquifer, and the aquifer is recharged (hopefully) by rainfall. When it doesn't rain, the aquifer level drops. If it drops low enough, there is no water. If you don't believe that droughts can affect areas that rely on water from aquifers, just talk to someone who lives in or near San Antonio.

I sincerely hope this article is not reflective of Sippial's knowledge about or attitude regarding this issue. If it is, at best Sippial is grossly uninformed. At worst, he is being disingenuous and misleading.

Robin M. Walker
Graduate student

A&M should drop green fixation

I must second everything stated by Patrick Troy in his letter to the editor about the wastefulness of the TAMU sprinkler system. I have noted on many occasions the sprinklers being on at the same time as rainfall. It seems that a school filled with brainiac engineers can't have an efficient sprinkler system, which seems pretty crazy to me. The pursuit of green grass (and, I guess, green streets and sidewalks) is so ravenous. Why? Surely Dr. Bowen realizes that this is a problem.

Christine Kirk
Graduate student

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