

(CNN) —When SpongeBob SquarePants skips onto shelves in boxes of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese next year, he may be a little less, well, yellow than your kids are used to.

Kraft has revamped its character-shaped product line for 2014, according to company spokeswoman Lynne Galia. The new versions will have six additional grams of whole grains, be lower in sodium and saturated fat, and will use spices instead of artificial food dyes to recreate the pasta's famous yellow-orange color.

"Parents have told us that they would like fun Mac & Cheese varieties with the same great taste, but with improved nutrition," Galia said in an e-mail.

The company will remove Yellow No. 5 and Yellow No. 6 from boxes containing pasta shaped like SpongeBob SquarePants and those with Halloween and winter shapes. Two new shapes of the popular pasta -- Nickelodeon's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and "How to Train Your Dragon 2" from Dreamworks -- will also be free of food coloring, Galia said.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest hailed Kraft's decision on Friday. Michael Jacobson, the center's executive director, said he is pleased with the announcement but is "puzzled" as to why Kraft would not change its iconic elbow-shaped macaroni product as well.

"As Kraft has today shown, it is clearly possible to make macaroni and cheese without these harmful chemicals," Jacobson said in a statement.

In Europe, foods with Yellow No. 5 are required to include a warning label that says, "This product may have adverse effect on activity and attention in children." Instead of adding this label on its products, Kraft chose to remove the artificial dyes from its European line, and uses paprika and beta-carotene to add color. The company has not make the same change in the United States.

That "double standard" is what convinced Food Babe blogger Vani Hari to start a Change.org petition to convince Kraft to remove these dyes from all of the company's products.

"We recently discovered that several American products are using harmful additives that are not used -- and in some cases banned -- in other countries," Hari wrote on the petition.

Yellow No. 5 has been linked to hyperactivity, asthma, some skin conditions and cancer, but larger scientific studies have proved inconclusive.

The Food and Drug Administration must approve color additives in the United States; Yellow No. 5 and Yellow No. 6 were approved for use in foods in 1969 and 1986, respectively.

More than 348,000 people have signed Hari's petition, and she delivered the electronic signatures to Kraft headquarters in April. She met with a public relations representative, but said she left the meeting feeling unsatisfied. Since then she has dedicated her time to pressuring the company to change.

Thousands of parents have sent her letters, she said, talking about the behavioral changes they've seen in their kids since they removed artificial dyes from their diets.

Hari doesn't have children herself, but she has two nephews that she worries about. "When I do have kids," she said, "I want to have a food system that I trust."

Hari is thrilled that Kraft is going to alter its new line, but says there is more work to do. Other companies have removed artificial dyes from their products overseas without doing the same in America, she says. There's another campaign on Change.org asking Mars Inc. to remove the additives from M&M's.

Jacobson urged parents to continue signing Hari's petition on Change.org.

"As long as the Food and Drug Administration remains perched up in the bleachers and not on the playing field, action on the part of the consumers is the only thing that will get these companies' attention," he said.

Read more: <http://www.wapt.com/news/health/Kraft-removing-some-dyes-from-mac-and-cheese/-/9156800/22754680/-/3wfhnez/-/index.html#ixzz2jPsNq7Yo>