

MURDA, HE WROTE

American Coke, high-fructose corn syrup, ain't sweet

Few things represent the ubiquity of American culture as well as Coca-Cola. Tin signs with the libation's signature cursive logo can be found in the farthest corners of the world. Coke sells an estimated 1.6 billion drinks each day, in 200 countries worldwide.

To feed the billions of sweet tooths craving their product, Coke has a well-developed distribution system that connects the company's secret formula with bottlers around the world. The bottling companies receive the formula as a premixed concentrate, later adding their own water and sweetener.

But the largely standardized process has not resulted in a "standard" Coke. The quality of Coke you enjoy will differ wildly, depending on where you are in the world.

One might think the best Coke in the world would be enjoyed on a hot summer day in Atlanta, Ga. — the company's

birthplace. However, truth is you'd probably get more satisfaction in a dingy Moroccan shack-turned-cafe on the edge of the Sahara desert.

The difference is in the sweetener — unlike in the United States, the bottling company providing Coke to Berbers in Morocco uses real cane syrup to sweeten its concentrate. The same is true of most European countries.

Bottlers in the U.S., however, have been using high-fructose corn syrup instead of sugar since 1984. There is no question the change results in a loss of quality. In fact, more discerning (and committed) Americans have been known to pay a premium at ethnic grocery stores for the Mexican variety, which contains cane sugar.

HFCS is a cheaper alternative for food manufacturers because of two reasons: corn subsidies and sugar tariffs.

Corn has been subsidized in the United States for years. With

bipartisan support to maintain the Midwest constituency, Americans have been paying farmers to grow more corn. Corn subsidies totaled some \$56 billion from 1995 through 2006. This has lowered the price of HFCS and contributed to the use of the controversial fuel called ethanol.

Meanwhile, the cheap cane sugar which could be imported from the Caribbean countries is inflated by tariffs meant to bolster domestic sugar production.

Besides not tasting as good as cane-syrup Coke, critics say HFCS is actually unhealthy. Corn producers point to research that says sugar is sugar, whether it comes from corn or cane. But some developments are alarming: A study earlier this year found

nearly half of the HFCS they tested contained mercury.

Whether or not HFCS is markedly less healthy than cane sugar, one thing is clear: Increased use of any sweeteners is tied to obesity and general bad health. The low cost of HFCS has lowered the prices of some of the worst food around — particularly fast food. In effect, Americans are paying corn producers to help make unhealthy food even cheaper.

Cheaper sweet foods mean Americans in worse health. In the midst of a raging health care debate in which one third of Americans are obese and 8 percent have diabetes, looking at food economics is central to the American wellness and nutrition system. The debate shouldn't only focus on how we fix people once they are sick but also how we get sick people (especially when government policy is the culprit).

The U.S. needs to stop subsidizing corn that undermines

Americans' health.

Getting rid of subsidies is central to free-market economics. But what then should become of the tariffs on imported sugar, which will raise the price of cheap food? Although fiddling with international trade in this matter invariably leads to wasted resources and higher costs, these results must be weighed against the public costs of cheap sweetener.

Maintaining the current taxes on imported sugar while dismantling the current giveaway system to corn farmers would help America's health and help Louisiana farmers. Besides, we'll all get to enjoy a real Coke — right here in the U.S.

Mark Macmurdo is a 22-year-old economics and history senior from Baton Rouge. Follow him on Twitter@TDR_mmurdo.

Contact Mark Macmurdo at mmurdo@lsureville.com



MARK MACMURDO
Columnist

PRESS X TO NOT DIE

Caution: your iPod could be an explosive device

Students should be aware they may be carrying around a bomb in their pockets. But wait, before you throw everything out of your pockets or rip your pants off in the middle of class — it isn't exactly what you're thinking. However, it is close.

Earlier this month, a family from Liverpool discovered its pint-sized explosive device the hard way. Eleven-year-old Ellie Stanborough was the proud owner of an iPod Touch. For those unfamiliar with the "iTouch," it's simply an iPhone that doesn't make phone calls, along with a few other minor feature differences. But her relationship with Apple came to a screeching halt when the company attempted to silence the Stanborough family after the iPod exploded.

That's right, I said exploded. A few weeks ago, Ellie's father Ken accidentally dropped his daughter's iPod, according to TimesOnline.

"It made a hissing noise," he told TimesOnline. "I could feel it getting hotter in my hand, and I thought I could see vapor."

Stanborough then threw the device out his back door. Seconds later, "there was a pop, a big puff of smoke and it went 10 feet in the air."

When Stanborough contacted Apple to have his iBomb replaced, not many people took him seriously. After being passed around from department to department, he finally spoke to an Apple executive on the phone.

The Stanborough family has not received a full refund in the

mail, at least not yet. What the family did receive was a letter basically saying the only way they would be reimbursed for the iPod Touch was if they signed a gag order swearing to keep silent on the matter and that Apple was not liable for selling Ellie a bomb.

While I do agree with Apple that people dropping their electronics does usually void any type of manufacturer's warranty, I cry foul in this case. Naturally, electronics don't work when you drop them, but they are not supposed to explode "10 feet in the air" as a result of the mishandling.

This is not the first case of an iPod causing serious damage. Reports from fires caused by iPods have been showing up since 2005, according to AppleInsider.

Really, Apple? Their devices have been burning people for the last four years, and they obviously haven't done anything to fix the problem. The problem is simple. The rechargeable battery inside of the iPods overheats to the point of ignition.

I blame Apple. This is a different case than a cell phone catching fire. Most reports of exploding cell phones are because the owner put a cheap, knockoff, third-party battery into their phone and the phone just didn't like it. That's not a new story. However, with iPods, there is no way of changing out the battery inside. That's all Apple's doing.

Last year, a mother sued Apple because her 15-year-old son's iPod Touch exploded in his pocket, burning his leg. Apple denied liability for their faulty hardware in that case too. These two recent cases should be problem enough for a company to change an obvious flaw in its battery production. Yet, with iPods being one of

the hottest pieces of gadgetry right now, Apple is just trying to do everything they can to keep this hush-hush and push on.

As an owner of an iPod Touch, I have sometimes felt the back of my iPod grow extremely hot, but never thought anything of it. I guess it wouldn't be such a bad idea to have a bomb squad on speed dial

from now on.

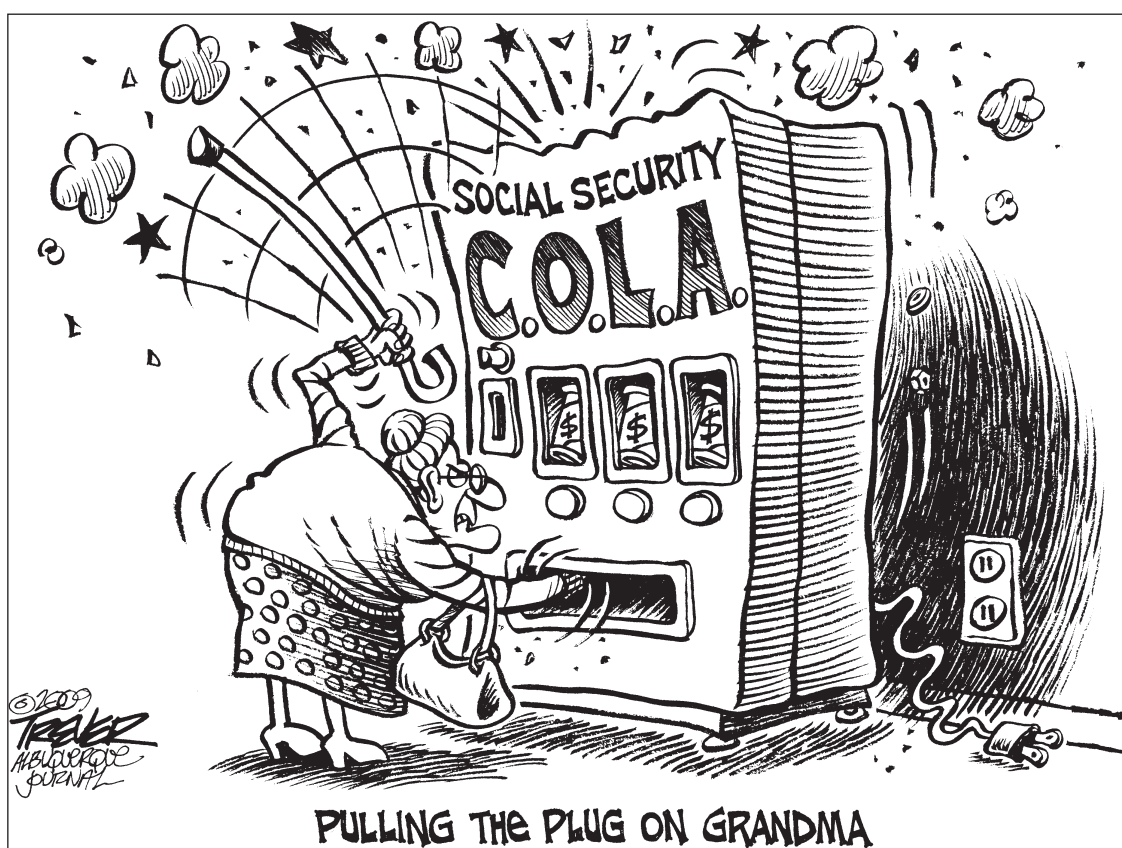
Adam Arinder is a 19-year-old electrical engineering junior from Baton Rouge. Follow him on Twitter@TDR_aarinder.

Contact Adam Arinder at aarinder@lsureville.com



ADAM ARINDER
Columnist

BEST AND WITTIEST



PULLING THE PLUG ON GRANDMA

cartoon courtesy of KING FEATURES SYNDICATE