

= Sweets and Sour Marge =

" Sweets and Sour Marge " is the eighth episode of The Simpsons ' thirteenth season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on January 20 , 2002 . In the episode , Homer gathers several of Springfield 's citizens to participate in creating the biggest human pyramid in the world . It fails , but they instead learn that Springfield is the world 's fattest town , prompting Homer 's wife Marge to sue Garth Motherloving 's sugar company .

" Sweets and Sour Marge " was written by Carolyn Omine and directed by Mark Kirkland . It was dedicated to the memory of Ron Taylor . Omine conceived the episode after hearing about smokers who sued tobacco companies . While its plot is loosely based on Erin Brockovich , the episode also features references to Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory , What 's Eating Gilbert Grape and Butterfinger . It also features Ben Stiller as Garth Motherloving . In its original broadcast , the episode was seen by approximately 7 @. @ 5 million viewers , finishing in 34th place in the ratings the week it aired . Following its home video release , the episode received mixed reviews from critics .

= = Plot = =

Homer buys a book on world records published by Duff at a library sale . After boring everyone with world record trivia , Homer decides to break a record himself . He gathers the whole town to build the world 's tallest human pyramid . After Jimbo and Kearney move their hands just before the record is claimed , the pyramid collapses into a giant sphere that rolls through town , taking in Agnes Skinner , Hans Moleman , and a suicidal man about to jump from a ledge onto the street . The entire town rolls to a truck weighing station and the Duff record book officials say that Springfield is the world 's fattest town (to which Homer responds : " Take THAT , Milwaukee ! ")

The townsfolk are happy to have made it in the record book , but Marge is worried that the whole town is overweight . She discovers that there is sugar in nearly everything Springfielders eat . After complaining to Garth Motherloving , head of the " Motherloving Sweets and Sugar Company " (voiced by Ben Stiller) , Marge decides to sue the sugar industry with the help of Gil and Professor Frink . Judge Snyder sides with her and bans all sugar products in Springfield , angering Homer and most of the town .

The whole town goes cold turkey and begins to suffer from intense sugar withdrawal . Homer joins a secret group led by Garth Motherloving to smuggle sugar from the island of San Glucos . After arriving back in Springfield , and evading a police boat , Homer brings the sugar to the docks . Marge pleads Homer to dump the cargo . There Homer is presented with two choices : to obey Marge and press the button Drop Cargo or bring the sugar to Garth Motherloving by pressing the button Obey Bad Guy . After contemplating , Homer drops the cargo and all the sugar falls to the Springfield docks ' water . All Springfielders , even those who seemed happier and healthier without sugar , jump into the harbor and drink the sugar water . Judge Snyder then declares the ban over and dives in with everyone else . Marge is upset and she thinks about giving up changing the world . However , Homer tells her that he loves her when she tries to make a world a better place .

= = Production = =

" Sweets and Sour Marge " was written by Carolyn Omine and directed by Mark Kirkland . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on January 20 , 2002 . The idea for the episode was pitched by Omine , who based it on a lawsuit at the time , wherein smokers sued tobacco companies for selling harmful wares . Omine found it " kinda weird " that the people did not take responsibility for their own health , and joked that , in the future , people might sue food companies for " making them fat " , which eventually became the episode 's plot . While making the episode , the Simpsons writers decided to compile a list of Springfield 's fat residents . According to Omine , the list " never ended " , and when the writers realized the amount of fat people there were in Springfield , they decided that the residents should try and " go for the world record " in the "

fattest people " category . The writers then decided that the residents were trying to set the world record for largest human pyramid , and then accidentally set the record for fattest population . The episode features the first appearance of Cletus ' cousin Dia @-@ Betty . The character was animated by Kirkland 's assistant Matt Faughnan , who has since become a regular director for the series . Garth Motherloving , the head of the " Motherloving Sweets and Sugar Company " , was portrayed by American actor and comedian Ben Stiller .

At one point in the episode , the Springfield residents try to set the record for largest human pyramid , which fails when the pyramid collapses , causing the people to roll into a giant ball . According to director Kirkland , the scene , which the staff members refer to as the " people ball " , was very difficult to animate , and it " almost gave [him] a migraine " determining how to implement it in the episode . While trying to figure out how to animate the " people ball " , Kirkland spray @-@ painted a globe with white primer and assigned layout artist Paul Wee to draw the Springfield citizens on it with black ink . Normally , the Simpsons animators each draw ten scenes per week , but because he drew the " people ball " , Wee was excused from these duties . Since drawing the " people ball " by hand would have " murdered " the animators , they soon decided to photograph it for each frame of the scene . The photographs were taken in Kirkland 's garage and were then photocopied using a Xerox photocopier . Executive producer and current showrunner Al Jean stated that the technique for animating the " people ball " was " extremely interesting " , although it has never been used again in the series . The " master drawing " of the human pyramid , which Kirkland also stated was very complicated , took animator Matthew Schofield a couple of days to draw . The drawing then became a reference for the other animators to use when animating the scene .

= = Cultural references = =

" Sweets and Sour Marge " 's plot is loosely based on the 2000 drama film Erin Brockovich , which revolves around Erin Brockovich 's legal fight against the US West Coast energy corporation Pacific Gas and Electric Company . The Duff Book of World Records is a parody on the annually published reference book Guinness Book of World Records . Cereal mascot Count Fudgula is a spoof on the General Mills cereal mascot Count Chocula (who , in turn , parodies fictional character Count Dracula) . After sugar becomes banned in Springfield , the town 's police force can be seen burning confiscated sugar products . However , when they throw an amount of Butterfinger candy bars in the fire , the bars start to glow and are left intact . Disappointed , police chief Clancy Wiggum explains " Butterfingers . Even fire doesn 't want them . " For a long time , The Simpsons characters starred in Butterfinger commercials , which helped the series get launched by earning revenue from the commercials . Around the time " Sweets and Sour Marge " was written , the series contract with Butterfinger was terminated , and the staff therefore decided to make fun of it . " If it had still been in existence , we wouldn 't have done it " , Jean said in the DVD commentary for the episode . Cletus ' cousin Dia @-@ Betty is loosely based on Darlene Cates ' character Bonnie Grape in the 1993 film What 's Eating Gilbert Grape . Before he agrees to hand the sugar cargo to Motherloving , Homer demands that he gets to see an Oompa Loompa , a character from the 1964 children 's book Charlie and the Chocolate Factory . The Oompa Loompa 's design is based on the version used in the 1971 film adaptation Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory , which Kirkland watched in order to " get [the design] right . "

= = Release = =

In its original American broadcast on January 20 , 2002 , " Sweets and Sour Marge " received a 7 @. @ 3 rating , according to Nielsen Media Research , translating to approximately 7 @. @ 5 million viewers . The episode finished in 34th place in the ratings for the week of January 14 @-@ 20 , 2002 . On August 24 , 2010 , " Sweets and Sour Marge " was released as part of The Simpsons : The Complete Thirteenth Season DVD and Blu @-@ ray set . Al Jean , Carolyn Omine , Matt Selman , Tom Gammill , Max Pross , Mark Kirkland and Matt Warburton participated in the audio commentary of the episode .

Following its home video release , " Sweets and Sour Marge " received mixed reviews from critics . Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide gave the episode a positive review , writing " What would Marge do on the show if she didn ' t stage campaigns to tell others what to do ? Despite the risk of redundancy , ' Sweets ' actually works quite well . " He praised Stiller 's appearance in the episode , as well as the " exploration of the records book " . He concluded his review by considering it " one of Season 13 's stronger programs " . Nate Boss of Project @-@ Blu was favorable as well , calling the episode " A funny take on class @-@ action suits (particularly those concerning other consumer products willingly purchased , like tobacco) , as well as prohibition . " DVD Verdict 's Jennifer Malkowski gave the episode a B rating , and wrote that the " library 's ' Yes , we have pornography ! ' banner " was the episode 's " highlight " . Giving it a more mixed review , Ron Martin of 411Mania called the episode " uneven at best , mediocre at worst " . Andre Dellamorte of Collider described it as a " redress " of the season 8 episode " Homer vs. the Eighteenth Amendment " , in which Springfield is faced with prohibition . Giving the episode a negative review , IGN 's R.L. Shaffer wrote that " Sweet and Sour Marge " , along with " Homer the Moe " , " The Frying Game " , and " The Old Man and the Key " " represent some of the worst of The Simpsons " .