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## What's Really in Your Food?

by Suzanne Nelson

Food labels were designed to earn our trust. Since 1990, the Food and Drug Administration has required manufacturers to list the ingredients of their products, and more recently, "Nutrition Facts" boxes appear on everything from cereal to chewing gum.

But as more Americans attempt to make healthy choices about what they put in their bodies, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to discern how our food was grown, processed and treated-thanks to our collective support of a food industry that wields its heft and political clout to create labeling laws that make a mockery of disclosure.

This is a story about a regulatory system increasingly friendly to the notion that consumers aren't smart enough or sufficiently informed to make the "right" choices-an idea the food industry uses to justify the argument that obfuscating the information on food labels serves some undefined public good. It's also about what happens to our food when industry attempts to achieve economies of scale to meet our expectations that a bag of organic lettuce mix should cost the same as a Yoo-hoo and carry almost as long a shelf life-not to mention our willingness to believe that everything edible constitutes food.

It's also a story about nomenclature. At some undetectable moment in recent history, modern food parlance parted ways with common standards of forthrightness and left us in an up-is-down world where food manufacturers may soon be able to subject food to ionizing radiation and call it "cold pasteurization," where "chocolate" may not have to actually contain cocoa and almonds labeled "raw" must be sprayed with a suspected human carcinogen.

In this world, makers of an artificial bovine hormone to increase milk production have used their leverage with regulators to bully dairies that don't use the hormone into cowering away from disclosing on their labels why consumers might want to avoid it. In this world, it is easier and more cost effective to unleash a mix of genetically modified viruses on lunchmeat for children's sandwiches rather than clean up filthy slaughterhouses. In this world, it is increasingly challenging for consumers desiring to make healthier choices to know which way to turn.

### **"Raw" almonds aren't, really**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently required that all almonds produced in the United States be pasteurized, including nuts labeled "raw." The rule went into effect Sept. 1, despite protests from health-conscious consumers who prefer unprocessed nuts and small-scale growers who can't afford the equipment, which costs between \$500,000 and \$2.5 million.

The move follows two Salmonella outbreaks attributed to raw almonds in 2001 and 2004. Critics of the rule point out that both incidents were the result of faulty practices at large-scale commercial farms. Small-scale and sustainable practices-including mowing and mulching to control weeds, instead of using chemical herbicides-naturally prevent the spread of harmful bacteria more effectively than post-harvest treatment, they say.

The Almond Board of California, a governing body representing all almond growers in the state, pushed for the change. Small growers complain that the board disproportionately represents the needs of the large producers.

A spokesman for the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service says that the agency simply responded to the almond board's request. "We basically move at the behest of industry," spokesman Jimmie Turner says. "If the industry calls and says they want a standard or a marketing order, we take that request, and normally we do what's called a notice in the Federal Register. We seek public comment, and based on that comment, there can be a marketing order established."

The same process is followed for all food stuffs, Turner says.

The Cornucopia Institute, a Wisconsin-based farm policy research group leading a campaign to convince the USDA to overturn the pasteurization rule, contends that labeling treated almonds as "raw" is deceptive. More than that, the group argues that it epitomizes the industrialization of our food supply.

"This is just the opening salvo of corporate agribusiness wanting to sanitize all of our food," says Mark Kastel, co-founder of the Cornucopia Institute. The impetus, Kastel says, is the economics of large-scale production. In many cases, such operations utilize growing and cultivation methods that provide much greater opportunity for contamination.

"After the fact, they want to use these technologies ... so they can sanitize our food supply, but it will do great damage to our food and, because of the infrastructure costs, will put out of business small and high-quality growers and independent processors," Kastel added.

To comply with the regulation, almond producers can either steam the nuts or fumigate them with propylene oxide (PPO), the almond board's preferred process. PPO is recognized as a possible human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. It is banned in the European Union, Canada, Mexico-and much of the rest of the world.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not require labeling of foods treated with the fumigant, and while packages of almonds may contain the disclaimer "pasteurized," there isn't likely to be any indication by which process the nuts were treated.

The only way consumers will be able to distinguish how their "raw" almonds were pasteurized is by the organic label. Regulations mandate that foods bearing the "organic" seal cannot be treated with PPO.

### **The forces against organic: profit and politics**

Examples of the regulated controlling the regulators-like almond producers writing their own rules-are rampant up and down the American food chain.

The USDA recently announced that 38 non-organic ingredients will be allowed in "organic" food. Reading the labels, consumers will be none the wiser. But the new rule is actually an improvement over previous ambiguity, as now manufacturers will be limited to using the ingredients that NOP has determined are "commercially unavailable."

Since the inception of the federal labeling program, foods labeled "USDA Organic" have been able to contain up to 5 percent non-organic ingredients. That 5 percent comprises ingredients not available in an organic form. The recent action was an effort to codify exactly which ingredients can be substituted with conventional versions in products that bear the seal, and the result will likely be fewer non-organic ingredients in "organic" food.

Although the action was controversial and remains so in the grassroots organic community (see "Organic' hops: A case study" on page 41), in many ways the updated regulations are not nearly as significant as the congressional action taken last year that permitted more than 500 synthetic food additives and processing aids in organic food without labeling or public review.

The language was inserted as a rider to the 2006 Agriculture appropriations bill. No hearings were held on the change. It passed despite more than 350,000 letters and phone calls to federal lawmakers, according to the Organic Consumers Association (OCA).

“The process was profoundly undemocratic and the end result is a serious setback for the multibillion dollar alternative food and farming system that the organic community has so painstakingly built up over the past 35 years,” says Ronnie Cummins, national director of OCA.

The 2006 controversy parallels a fight in 2003 when Congress inserted a provision into a spending bill that would have allowed meat and poultry producers to label their products “organic” even if the animals were fed conventional feed-if the price of organic feed exceeded a certain level. The exception was later repealed. Cummins hopes to bring the same fate upon the synthetics loophole or at least significantly curtail its reach.

To groups such as the Organic Consumers Association and the Cornucopia Institute, there is a principle at stake. Individuals pay more for organic food because they want to support sustainable farming practices and avoid consuming petrochemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides as well as hormones and antibiotics and synthetic ingredients. The whole reason the National Organic Standards were created was to assure buyers they were getting what they paid for, but the integrity of the standards have been under industry assault since their implementation five years ago.

### **Hormone-free milk? Can't say**

It's one thing for a manufacturer to avoid disclosure about a product's ingredients. It's quite another to prevent another company from providing information to its customers, but that is exactly what Monsanto has been up to. The biotech giant is the sole producer of artificial growth hormones given to cows to increase milk production.

A growing grassroots backlash over the use of hormones has prompted restaurant chains such as Chipotle to pledge to only use dairy products free of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), also known as bovine somatotropin (BST). Grocery chains Kroger, Publix and Safeway also have restricted their private-label milk to that from cows not given the drug, although Safeway has thus far made the move only in the Pacific Northwest. Starbucks has indicated that all of its coffee shops will be rBGH-free by early 2008.

Despite studies-many funded by Monsanto-indicating that the growth hormone is safe, questions about the injections' implications for human health have persisted since its approval in 1993. Milk produced by cows given the drug contains elevated amounts of insulin-like growth factor, which some studies have shown to increase the risk of breast, colon and prostate cancers. (No direct link has been shown between milk from cows given the hormone and increased cancer rates.)

The hormones are banned in every other industrialized country. If Monsanto has its way, it will become increasingly difficult for American consumers to even determine whether it is in their milk and what that might mean for their health. As it stands, the FDA doesn't require milk from cows treated with the hormone to be labeled at all.

Monsanto told its investors last November that growing demand of “rBGH-free” milk could affect the company's bottom line. A couple of months later, the company petitioned the FDA to issue “stronger guidance” regarding milk producers' indications on the carton that their milk is free of the artificial growth hormone.

Under 1994 guidance from the FDA-which approved the use of rBGH and maintains that it's completely safe-most dairy processors that market milk from cows not treated with the hormone include a disclaimer on the label indicating that “no significant difference has been shown between milk derived from rBST-treated and non-rBST-treated cows.” Monsanto asked the agency to revisit the issue, as the company deems that this disclaimer is not enough to “balance” what it asserts are deceptive claims by producers that milk from cows not treated with the hormones is healthier.

The company also petitioned the Federal Trade Commission to take action on grounds that milk processors “mislead customers by falsely claiming that there are health and safety risks associated with milk from rBST-supplemented cows.”

In response, the FDA reaffirmed its commitment to the current guidance for labeling rBGH milk. The FTC requested that several companies amend the way they label milk from cows free of the artificial hormone. The companies complied, according to Monsanto.

To Cummins of the Organic Consumers Association, the premise upon which Monsanto petitioned the FDA and the FTC is absurd. Monsanto claims that the two milks are identical and that companies implying health attributes to milk from cows free of the hormone are somehow misleading their customers. Cummins says those claims are demonstrably false.

“There is a difference, that’s why it’s patented. There is a difference, that’s why it’s banned in much of the industrialized world. There is a different amino acid chain at the end,” Cummins says.

Milk naturally contains a bovine growth hormone, but the rBGH is synthetically engineered and has a different chemical composition, he explains.

The FDA maintains there is no difference in milk from cows treated with the artificial hormone and those that are not, but Cummins says that’s because the agency is not testing for it. He says the agency has admitted at various points that a dozen chromatography machines around the country have detected its presence in the milk.

A Monsanto spokesman says the FDA has not conveyed any such information to the company and that such allegations run contrary to the “FDA’s very voluminous ruling on this matter.” Both the FDA and Monsanto assert that there is no “compositional” difference between milk from cows treated with the hormone and cows that are not.

Either way, Cummins says, the agency is flouting the law and its own regulations.

“You are not supposed to get an animal drug approved unless you have a detection plan for it, the idea being that if you legalize an antibiotic in animal feed, they want to be able to test to make sure that there is not a dangerous level of antibiotics in the milk,” he says.

In Monsanto’s view, the distinction is that rBGH is a hormone, not an antibiotic or pesticide.

The fact sheet provided by the FDA explains that long-term research to assess the safety of rBGH was unnecessary because studies demonstrated that bovine growth hormone “is biologically inactive in humans even if injected,” the artificial version is “orally inactive” and the natural hormone and the artificially created version are “biologically indistinguishable.”

FDA spokesman Michael Herdon declined to comment on the issue further, stating that the “FDA’s current position on rBGH is well-documented.”

The issue of antibiotics is a whole other subject. According to Cummins, the FDA rarely tests milk or meat for antibiotics given “off-label.”

“Veterinarians can sell a drug to a farmer that is not approved for that use,” Cummins says. “Europeans are appalled that U.S. dairy farmers have access to 50 to 100 antibiotics, whereas [the FDA] only tests for four.”  
Chocolate by any other name?

The FDA is also currently pondering a somewhat sweeter question: What makes “chocolate” chocolate? The dark delectable has long been understood as a confection made from crushed cacao beans, which provide the solid cocoa mass, as well as cocoa butter. The cocoa butter is responsible for the “melt in your mouth” goodness.

Trouble is, cacao beans are expensive, and industrial chocolate manufacturers have petitioned the

FDA to allow them to replace the cocoa butter with cheaper fats and still call the resulting edible “chocolate.” Cocoa butter has become increasingly prized for cosmetics and lotions, so the companies could make a bigger buck selling it for skin creams.

The petition came as part of a block of more than 200 proposed changes to food standards requested by the Grocery Manufacturers Association. In response to widespread press coverage, much of it negative, the FDA released a statement indicating that cacao fat, “as one of the signature characteristics of the product, will remain a principal component.” What it didn’t say, however, was just how much cocoa butter manufacturers will be able to substitute with vegetable oil and still call their product “chocolate.”

A theme of nondisclosure

The number of ingredients, processes and modifications not disclosed on food labels is long and growing.

Just in the past year, the FDA has determined that meat from cloned animals can be allowed in the human food supply without disclosure.

And the agency also recently announced that manufacturers of deli meats are free to spray ham, bologna, salami and the like with a mix of six genetically modified viruses to combat potential contamination with *Listeria*, a bacteria that makes deli meats one of the top contributors to food-borne illnesses in the United States.

Consumer groups have criticized the USDA for years for failing to get meat processors to clean up the plants so that *Listeria* and other microorganisms couldn’t find a hospitable home in foods commonly served to children without further cooking. Instead the FDA decided to let the companies spray the meats with viruses engineered to consume the potentially harmful bacteria.

“Who knows what these things do?” asks Sally Fallon, president of the Weston A. Price Foundation, which helps people return to traditional and whole food diets. “They could be toxic in their own right, and it’s no substitute for cleaning up their act.”

Also in the meat case, the federal government has declined to intervene in the now-widespread practice of “modified atmospheric packaging,” whereby “fresh” meat is preserved with carbon monoxide and other gases. Meats packaged in polystyrene trays with plastic wrap have a shelf life of less than a week, but gas packing allows beef to stay bright red for weeks or even months. Trouble is, the meat may look fresh without actually being fresh. Last year Consumer Reports found that three out of 10 gas-packed ground beef samples had spoiled by their use-by date, even though the meat still appeared red.

There are no disclosure requirements for the use of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, oxygen and nitrogen to preserve the appearance of meat, however, consumers can tell whether their beef, poultry or pork was packaged that way by a taut plastic seal not touching the meat.

### **Invisible GMOs**

Foods produced using genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have never required labeling, even though studies in animals have shown them to cause tissue damage, kidney and liver toxicity, sterility, neurotoxicity, aggression and early death. Little to no research on their long-term safety in humans has been conducted. Genetically modified strains now comprise the majority of the corn and soy grown in the United States.

The FDA is also considering a rule that would allow manufacturers to irradiate food as a way to remove pathogens and call the process “cold pasteurization” or “electronic pasteurization.” There would be no indication to consumers that the product was subjected to ionizing radiation.

“What the industry has found is that requiring labeling of irradiation means that stores don’t want to sell it,” Cummins says. “Cold pasteurization sounds fairly natural compared to irradiation.”

According to Cummins, the issues of genetically modified foods and irradiation are inextricably linked from a regulatory perspective. In 1986, when the FDA proposed regulations to allow irradiation and decided to require labeling, scientists at the agency acknowledged that benzene, formaldehyde and other unique radiolytic compounds produced by irradiation had never before been seen in food.

“There is plenty of evidence out there that irradiation changes food in an alarming way, and the reason the FDA was caused to require labeling in the first place was because it changes the nature of the food,” Cummins explained, citing a study done by the Council of Medical Research in India, which showed children fed irradiated wheat for six weeks had chromosomal damage not exhibited in control groups.

Six years later, when it came time to determine whether genetically modified foods would have to be labeled as such, the agency “made the stunning scientific pronouncement that they were substantially equivalent, which they were not able to uphold with irradiated food.” The determination meant that labeling would not be required.

“When the scientists said there were substantial changes in the foods, they had to follow the statute,” which requires disclosure for foods that meet that criteria, Cummins said. “Then a few years later they realized that we better not do that again. They don’t have a leg to stand on scientifically, but they have just used the power of the FDA and corporate America to not label GMOs.”

–*Suzanne Nelson*

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## 17 Comments so far

1. andersdl October 11th, 2007 1:52 pm

How do we get the best congress money can buy to improve the FDA? All indications are that it keeps getting worse?

Is there any other nation that has labelling regulations that are more objective and don't require the consumer to carry an FDA dictionary with them when they go shopping.

Since the current system does not appear to be fixable, incorporating a model regulation from another nation may be the only way to fix it (if the political will ever arises to actually fix it).

2. bloofer October 11th, 2007 2:19 pm

I think most people who are able would be wise to begin growing a vegetable garden—as big as you can manage.

Ultimately, if you want food that is safe and wholesome, there is hardly any other affordable

alternative. I'm an alarmist, but I'm a little afraid that, if you want to eat at all, there will soon be no other affordable alternative.

Might as well get the skills and the tools, and start building your soil now. It can take a long time to achieve good production. Building the soil takes time. Developing the knowledge and skill takes time. Tools can be costly.

Until recently, a gardener could feel comfortable about growing lots of vegetables, and buying the cheaper grains and beans. (It hardly made economic sense to grow them.) It's now looking like the home food-grower needs to learn to grow grains and legumes, as well—for reasons having as much to do with contamination as with increasing prices.

3. [hashfunction](#) October 11th, 2007 3:00 pm

One other way out of this is to buy from local farmer's markets. As for meat, I would recommend buying at any halaal meat store. The Halaal meat is not packaged or altered in any way. The butcher will cut the beef or other meat right in front of your eyes and prepare it as you want it. As for the chicken, the butcher will again cut it right in front of your eyes.

However, there is no reason now-a-days to buy and consume meat when viable alternatives in vegetables and nuts and beans exist.

4. [willo](#) October 11th, 2007 3:38 pm

Until we get this bunch of criminals that are running this place out they will continue to destroy and subvert the regulatory institutions that are supposed to protect us. What they do now is find the worst possible candidate for each position, ususally someone with an axe to grind against said agency. Then they are told mess it up as much as they can before being thrown out. They also like to invent clever names for the destruction they cause by giving it a name opposite of what it is doing, eg.[blue sky policy would really mean more pollution].

5. [tech2](#) October 11th, 2007 4:25 pm

When I walk through the local supermarket, I would love to buy some of the almonds, pistacio nuts, cashews etc... I see, but I just don't trust them anymore.

If these items are coming from thousands of km away, how can I possibly understand what has been done to them?

What country were they grown in?

What sort of regulations does that country have in place?

That is a big blow against any sort of move towards vegetarianism, as far as I am concerned.

Its not that easy to grow your own food. It takes a lot of time, especially if you don't want to use pesticides.

Proper labelling is a must. Thanks to the author for keeping us informed!

6. [Rayberth](#) October 11th, 2007 4:51 pm

What is the problem with letting the buyer know how the food they buy has been treated by the producers? And why doesn't our government make sure we get that information? Isn't the role of the government to safeguard the welfare of its citizens?

7. [Paranoid Pessimist](#) October 11th, 2007 5:29 pm

Rayberth:

Our government doesn't make sure we get good information about our food because the government agencies are there to service the food industry, they are staffed by food industry insiders, and the philosophy of those who work in government agencies is to support industry

(despite what they say in their press releases). The ingredients of most foods are there because they facilitate the factory mass production and add fake flavors, not because they are healthful and wholesome (again despite what is said in the press releases).

They have industrial best interests at heart, not ours, and people who don't understand this will remain blissfully unaware of the poisoning the system is doing to their systems.

8. MaxheMust October 11th, 2007 6:34 pm

Yes to growing your own veggies. It is a very gratifying endeavor. IF you go organic, you'll know that they haven't been sprayed with harmful pesticides. Like Bloofer says - it takes some time & effort to achieve good production.

Before much longer, after the US economy totally collapses, there will be some problems getting food.

Grow your own!!

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"I swear by the God of my parents, I swear by my nation,  
I swear by my honor that I will not allow my soul to rest,  
nor my arm to relax until I have broken the chains  
that oppress my people through the will of the powerful.  
Free elections, free land and free men, horror to the oligarchy."

Oath used by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez - the Great,  
(when he was 28) and some of his revolutionary friends.  
-copied from Page 80, !HUGO! by Bart Jones

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The revolutionary path is bathed in light. Take the oath and do what you can! To be complacent is to be complicit.

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"Almost anything you do [to help humanity] will seem insignificant, but it's very important that you do it."  
Mahatma Gandhi

9. kayaker October 11th, 2007 8:29 pm

Growing your own food sounds like a good idea. Of course you would have to know the history of the soil you are growing in or have it completely tested to see what is in it. Could have been a dumpsite for a hazardous material before you bought it. You would also need to grow a large per-centage of the food you will eat or it wouldn't make much difference. People eat several pounds of food each day. A family of four would need to grow several tons of food each year. And it would need to be balanced. Don't forget fruit and nut trees, sources of protein, several different colors of vegetables etc. You wouldn't want to freeze or even refrigerate all that food (global warming from electricity use) so you will need to dig a rather large root cellar to keep it cool. Or do a LOT of preserving. Better grow enough to sell in case you have to quit your job in order to grow all that food. Good luck. At least you can have a few fun days at the beach while you are making sea salt.

10. BugsBBunny III October 12th, 2007 4:48 am

I thought capitalism was supposed to inspire creativity and innovation that communism and what have you didn't. These days it looks more and more like the old competitive capitalism

we believed in has morphed into a mega-capitalism. Huge corporate conglomerates are so big whom do they have to compete against really? They seem increasingly anti-people in favor of increasing profits. Monsanto may 'grow' food but they want it on their terms. Large dairies don't want to compete against unadulterated milk, so they lobby for a law which prevents the milk cartons of their non growth hormone competitors from advertising the carton contains only milk (in effect). Irradiation is cold pasteurization?

Everywhere you look we are 'fed' lies and deceit. Exactly what do we believe in anymore? Millions of pounds of ground beef were recalled all at once. Mega capitalism sure racks up the profits but it seems once a certain size is reached then competition becomes irrelevant. Moreover their influence in Govt circles is without effective competition/checks and balances.

We'd rather buy pure foods over adulterated, irradiated, anti-biotic laden ones and rather than compete the mega-corps have the influence to effectively remove that competition. They want it that we have no choice nor anyway to know which is which on the shelves.

Is this really what capitalism was about? Is this non-competitive mega-capitalism really capitalism as we understood it? They spray viruses on deli meat? Who the f'k even knew that? Geeze.

Well I don't know lots of things I am finding out. I thought I did for decades but evidently what used to be normal is now the exception. Ordinary plain food... like I grew up with is now virtually a rarity and is sold in the specialty foods section...organic.

Yet organic isn't really organic and less and less so, I hear. Not that you have anyway of telling that on the shelf. Hell you go to a fruit stand and who knows what you are eating anymore. In America we have always had a surplus of milk yet the search for increased profits nevertheless forces us to have to drink hormone and perhaps antibiotic laced milk.

Viruses sprayed on deli meat rather than cleaning up slaughter houses? So basically filthy meat can be sold when you think about it. Capitalism is failing and mega-capitalism is supplanting it.

But hey ya got to eat. Who knows what you really are eating though. It wasn't the commies who did this to us and as we see in Chinese imported foods they are just as bad or worse.

Got milk? Hey...? Is milk supposed to glow in the dark? Are you sure? Well okay... but I'm pretty sure babies weren't supposed to glow in the dark and...huh? Are you sure? Well okay then if you say so but I don't think saving electricity on nitelights is a good trade off. What do I know anyway. So they spray viruses on contaminated meat and say it's 'fresh'? Um...which mix of sprayed on viruses is tastier? I'm willing to pay slightly more for the better tasting ones. I still have choice... Okay nevermind... I've lost my appetite.

Coming to a supermarket near you > "This product contains 33% real food." Ah finally ...the good stuff!

11. tech2 October 12th, 2007 7:14 am

I hate to say it, BUGS, but in some regards the general public is their own worst enemy, because its the wal-mart mentality - the drive for the lowest possible price that is partly to blame for the situation you describe.

If the majority of people shop for food solely on the basis of price, then we get what we get. Why can't the general public understand what it takes to make high quality food? Lack of understanding, due to growing up in cities? lazy faith that quality control is out there somewhere? what ever it is the great mass of shoppers out there have empowered Wal-Mart to get into the food business etc..

Maybe schools need to have more field trips to farms or even basic agriculture course or nutrition rather than “video production101” or “Introduction to Finding Yourself” something like that.

Proper labeling is a really excellent start - even wal-mart shoppers can still read.

12. pacplyer October 12th, 2007 9:03 am

NEW RULES:

1. A big company is an evil company. The government is no longer a government; it's an extension of evil.
2. If you can't verify the chain of custody of that food (i.e. pick it off the tree yourself or buy it from a trusted little farmer) don't eat it.
3. If it's encased in plastic (leaches plastic chemicals,) or, it's in a can (biocide, solvent, petroleum, and polymers,) or it's been processed in any way (who knows what frankenstien additives added) don't eat it.
4. US beef is chalk full of hormone residue and antibiotic remainants due to massive dirty profitable stockyards. Don't eat it!

These huge corporations despise the freedom of the individual to choose, or even to know what's in their shoddy bag of low nutrient crappola.

NATIONAL BOYCOTT (you'll save \$ and live longer anyway eating a semi-veg diet with some fish and chicken)

[http://www.barking-moonbat.com/index.php/weblog/comments/arrrrh\\_grog\\_from\\_cans\\_sucks/](http://www.barking-moonbat.com/index.php/weblog/comments/arrrrh_grog_from_cans_sucks/)

hang in there,

pac

13. RuthK October 12th, 2007 9:32 am

The Organic Comsumers Association has a great deal of information on this:

<http://organicconsumers.org>

The Center for Science in the Public Interest has additional information, including warnings on “false fat” and other additives.

<http://www.cspinet.org/>

The “Food additives” option has a comprehensive, printable list of additives with safety information. It is worth printing out.

14. bloofer October 13th, 2007 6:25 am

A couple of people who've posted exaggerate the difficulty of growing your own food. Sure, few people are in a position to grow all their food—and not everyone has the inclination. (Sort of like I don't have the inclination to look under the hood of my car.)

Even if you can't grow all your own food, you can grow more than you think—a lot more than you think.

It's not difficult to master the basics of organic gardening. John Jeavons' “How to Grow More Vegetables” is a great reference. Jeavons has shown that his methods are 3 to 6 times more

productive, per unit of space, than conventional agriculture. It's possible to harvest more than 400 pounds of tomatoes from a 100-square-foot tomato patch. That's 10' X 10'.

I've never bothered with soil testing. I just use average recommended amounts of organic fertilizers.

Most people have a pretty good idea of the history of their soil. If you live in a residential area, it is unlikely that it was ever a toxic waste dump. More likely, it was farmland at one time. Former owners may have poured pesticides and herbicides on the lawn, but if you don't do the same, they will dissipate over time—and you'll still be better off growing organically, even on abused soil, than you would be buying produce that was sprayed with pesticides, chemically fertilized, and shipped 1,500 miles—and that may have been harvested long before reaching you and so is not fresh, let alone tree- or vine-ripened.

If you grow your own food, you can grow the tastiest varieties: the finest heirloom tomatoes, the sweetest carrots, the fanciest gourmet greens, the most delicate summer squash, and the most sugary winter squash—vegetables that probably aren't available in grocery stores, or that would cost you a fortune in health food stores.

I'm a pessimist about the food situation in the US—and the economic situation. I worry that things will get very bad in both areas.

15. bloofer October 13th, 2007 6:34 am

I have to add: In my opinion, the reason people in the US are obese is not affluence. It's starvation—nutrient starvation from eating nutrient stripped foods.

Vegetables grown with chemical fertilizers are far lower in nutrients than organically grown vegetables. Most of the American diet consists of foods that have about the same nutritional value as cardboard soaked in lard. Americans overeat because their bodies are hungry for the nutrients they are not getting from their food.

If you want to lose weight, eat whole grains and organically grown vegetables. You won't be constantly craving food, because you'll be fully nourished—in other words, “full.” The body will be satisfied.

16. tech2 October 13th, 2007 7:06 am

BLOOFER,

-some rodent moved in next to a new melon patch I carved out (no fencing yet) and that along with some severe powdery mildew (perfect weather conditions), pretty well destroyed my melon crop this year.

-had to harvest my corn early due to pests

-deer ate all the califlower/broccoli in the new patch (mentioned above)

-worst year for weevils I have ever seen - lots of problems here.

-I cannot afford to lime my hayfield so I am getting severe weed intrusion of deadly things like paintbrush, goldenrod, pigweed, etc... etc...

I could go on. If you are a gardener, then you know the solutions, but my point is that it takes TIME and KNOWLEDGE.

I still do it. Its fun. And I will be having pure carrot juice with dinner tonight, and praising God for the bounty of my harvest. But its a lot of work, until you are properly set up, and that takes years.

Lets not even get into preserving.

I have a healthy respect for the accomplishments of modern agriculture. But its such a tragedy that farmers are near forced into practices that they know are wrong, because of the control major corporations have over the process.

This article mentions smaller processors that have banded together to survive and promote good practices - supporting them is the best thing most people can do.

**MAKE THE EFFORT TO FIND THEM AND SUPPORT THEM BY PURCHASING THEIR PRODUCTS.**

You won't find them at Wal-mart or A&P.

17. kyli October 22nd, 2007 4:52 am

The sad truth is this government or any other for that matter in the world is not prepared for what is going to happen to this plant! Our plant is going trough a major climate change and with 6.6 billion people to feed you would hope and pray that we can find a way to make a food source last. We may dream of that healthy back yard garden but that will not feed climate refugees of the future. Heat,drought and floods will destroy crops and the land that we have left for anything healthy to grow will be needed for us to live on. As we complain about not getting healthy foods we as a whole are not thinking up ways to sustain our civilization. The sad truth is as James Lovelock scientists,author of Gaia said "We need to move out of the natural food loop" with this said we have two real life options for the future of this plant either we return to a primitive lifestyle of being hunters and gathers, no farming of animals or plants to protect land and live equally with earth or we become a super high tech civilization and learn to have alternatives.Where will we get our food? I know my answer and thats to learn and study and gain the technology to survive the future.We are going to have to learn how to synthesize food, it may not be the organic way but it is one of the only ways to sustain this plant for we do not need to farm anymore land to gain food.It sounds crazy but in a technological view its not that hard.For example Quorn is a meat substitute made from edible fungus. Thats some food for thought....

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