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China's 6 Most Contaminated Foods: Now at a Grocery Near You

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With the selling of Smithfield Foods (one of the largest and oldest pork producers in the U.S.) to Shuanghui International (one of China's largest meat processors) in a record-breaking \$4.7 billion buyout, concerns are growing about China's expanding role in the American food supply and its increasing implications on your food safety.

Consider this: If you had tilapia with spinach and mushrooms for lunch, you probably did so because you thought it would be healthy. And, normally, it would be. However, today it's highly probable that this entire meal was imported from China.

In May 2013, during a testimony before a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, food safety expert Patty Lovera noted that China accounted for 80% of tilapia, 51% of cod, 49% of apple juice, 34% of processed mushrooms, 27% of garlic and 16% of frozen spinach consumed in the U.S. in 2011. Is it mere coincidence that these six food items are among the most-often contaminated foods at grocery stores?

Reports in recent years from domestic and foreign sources concerning serious violations of food safety in China have been continuous and alarming. In 2012 alone, China had thousands of dead pigs show up in a major river, endured deadly milk scandals and sold rat meat as mutton. In addition, as Lovera explained to Congress, there is "widespread smuggling of products like honey to avoid tariffs and food safety restrictions [and] mislabeled products 'transshipped' through another country but produced in China."

Additionally, in 2011, more than half of all food processing and packaging firms in China failed their safety inspections. Meanwhile, in the U. S., inspections of imported food products are minuscule compared to the total volume of imports. According to a recent study by the Democrats on the House Appropriations Committee in 2011, FDA inspections were a mere 2.3 percent of the total of all imported food products.

The same FDA study states that food imports from China and India have risen 10 percent annually since 2004, and are estimated to grow by 9 percent annually through 2020.

So, what can you do to protect yourself at the grocery store?

(1) Don't believe the internet myth that reading bar codes will properly identify foods imported from China. Contrary to current belief, the most commonly used UPC bar codes do

not contain any kind of country identifier. EAN standard bar codes do contain country identifiers, but those digits only show where the bar code was registered - not the food product's country of origin.

(2) For processed or packaged foods, a somewhat reliable way to know the country of origin of is to look for the label, "Made in (country's name)." However, this is not always accurate because when ingredients are imported from China for a processed or packaged product, that information will most likely not be included on the label (as was the case recently with contaminated vanilla extract from China).

(3) For meat and seafood, knowing the origin became much easier on May 23, 2013 when the Department of Agriculture amended its Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) to "provide consumers with more specific information" on meat and seafood in grocery stores. (Smaller stores such as fish markets and butcher shops are exempt; however, many smaller shops are now touting their local sources.) The new COOL laws require grocers to label exactly where their meats and seafood came from.

(4) As for fruits and vegetables, the best way is to buy locally. A good place to search for your local sources is realtimfarm.com and its crowd-sourced nationwide food guide, "Know Where Your Food Comes From."

Sources:

<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA14/20130508/100807/HHRG-113-FA14-Wstate-LoveraP-20130508.pdf>

<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-threat-china's-unsafe-consumables>

<http://www.hoaxorfact.com/Health/how-to-read-bar-codes-and-avoid-harmful-foods.html>

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<http://www.realtimfarm.com>

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4 Responses to China's 6 Most Contaminated Foods: Now at a Grocery Near You

Michael Morejon on [June 10, 2013 at 3:49 pm](#) said:

Wow, that's nuts. Organic all the way for me.

judy davis on [June 10, 2013 at 3:57 pm](#) said:

Then, we have to go back to supporting our own farmers and manufacturers, and stop buying from other countries. Wouldn't we want to spur our own economy anyway?

Karen Wood on [June 10, 2013 at 8:49 pm](#) said:

Wow, what an eye-opener! I've been eating tilapia quite frequently, but have grown slightly tired of it. I'll do more of my shopping at the local farmer's market now, and there's at least one local supermarket/grocer that only buys locally. I'll go there!

Robert Evich on [June 11, 2013 at 2:46 am](#) said:

Dr Colbert, thanks for sharing . This is some scary stuff !

COMMENTS

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Community Poll

In 2009, food companies like Dannon and Yoplait strawberry yogurts admitted to using what source of artificial