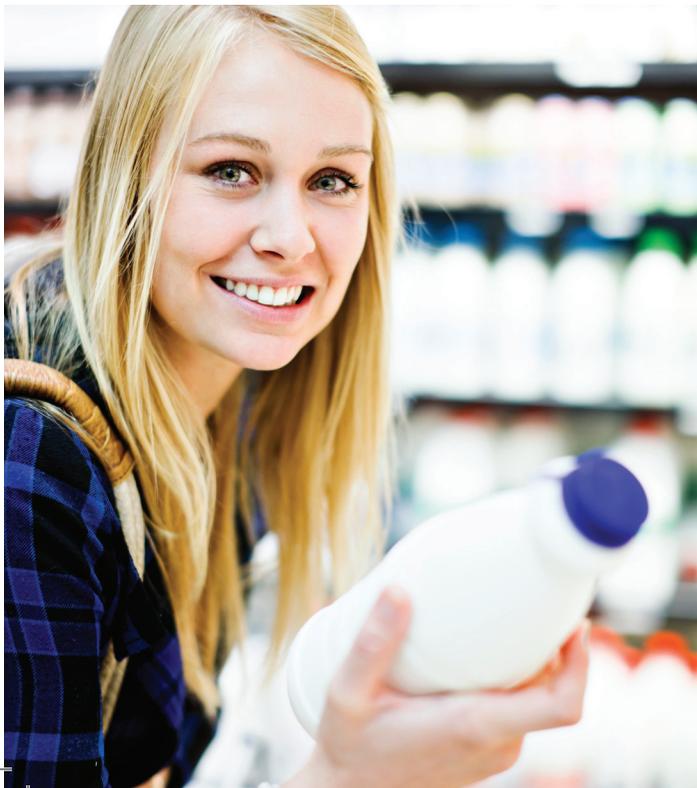


Reducing chemical exposure at home

- Purchase natural cleaning products or make your own non-toxic cleaners (see our All About Natural Cleaners brochure).
- Select personal care products with fewer chemical ingredients and fragrances.
- Store food in glass or stainless steel containers, especially hot beverages and foods.
- Educate yourself about fish and seafood to discover the most sustainable and healthy options.
- Consider choosing organic foods.
- Ask your state representatives to support policies protecting environmental and human health.



Resources

Organics

US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

www.usda.gov

GMOs

Just Label It

justlabelit.org

Environmental contaminants and food regulations

Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov

Environmental Working Group

www.ewg.org/key-issues/toxics

Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch

www.seafoodwatch.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx

The Natural Resource Defense Council

www.nrdc.org

US Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

www.atsdr.cdc.gov

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

www.fda.gov



StrongerTogether.coop is a consumer website developed by **National Co+op Grocers (NCG)** for our “virtual chain” of over 140 retail food co-ops, operating more than 190 storefronts, nationwide.

StrongerTogether.coop is a place for people to gather on their food journeys. It's a place to find out more about what's in your food, where it comes from, where to find great food, how to prepare it and a whole lot more.

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Food Issues and Labeling



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The natural foods industry provides consumers with alternatives to some of the ways food is commonly produced today. Co-ops can help consumers find nutritious, delicious foods that promote their health and the health of our environment, and empower shoppers to make sustainable choices for a healthy future. This brochure provides a brief overview of some common food issues, regulations and labels.

Organic food

Organic food is produced using more sustainable, environmentally-sound farming methods that employ time-honored soil and pest management techniques which don't require the application of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. In addition, food certified as organic by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) cannot contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or undergo irradiation, making it the gold standard of food labels for consumers who are concerned about these issues.

Labeling of organic food

In the U.S., the USDA National Organic Program is responsible for setting the standards by which farms, producers and food handlers can be Certified Organic. Organic producers must follow strict rules and keep careful records to verify that they follow allowable procedures. They are inspected by a third party certifier annually. Only food that bears the USDA Certified Organic seal has been inspected and verified as organic under the law.



Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

A GMO is a plant or animal that has been genetically altered by scientists to improve its ability to grow in non-native environments, resist pests, tolerate extreme weather conditions, produce more food (like milk in cows) or show other desired traits. In other words, a GMO is a new version of a food, plant or animal engineered by scientists in a laboratory. This is different from the traditional process of genetic hybridization, wherein natural breeding

between two species make a third natural organism (i.e. raspberry crossed with blackberry created the boysenberry).

GMO techniques insert or delete genes from a plant or animal's DNA. This yields organisms with characteristics that are not likely to occur in nature, like a tomato with a fish gene designed to help it resist cold temperatures, or a corn plant with a bacteria gene that tolerates increased herbicide application.

Labeling of GMO foods

As of 2014, in the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require GMOs to be labeled in food. This means that unless the producer chooses to disclose the GMO status of its ingredients, consumers do not know if they are eating GMOs. In more than 60 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan and all of the European Union, GMOs are either required to be labeled or banned completely.

In the U.S., it is estimated that GMOs are in as much as 80% of conventional processed food. Concerned consumers can look for third party verified non-GMO labeling or choose to buy USDA Certified Organic foods, which are not allowed to contain GMOs. In lieu of these certifications, read the ingredients list. The crops most likely to be genetically engineered in the U.S. are corn, soy, sugar from sugar beets, canola, cotton (cottonseed oil), alfalfa, zucchini and Hawaiian papaya. Additionally,

animals fed conventional corn, soy or alfalfa in the U.S. have most likely been raised on GMOs.

Food Irradiation

Irradiation is the process of exposing food to ionizing radiation that kills harmful bacteria such as salmonella, listeria and E. coli. The radiation breaks chemical bonds in molecules, killing all pathogens. However, the food is not exposed long enough to become "radioactive."

The FDA has approved irradiation for use on spices, fruits, vegetables, pork, poultry and red meat. No human studies have been conducted to assess the long-term safety of irradiated food.

Labeling of irradiated foods

Currently, the FDA requires labeling for irradiated foods sold in grocery stores, but not for foods sold in restaurants, school lunch programs or as ingredients in processed foods. A product that contains irradiated ingredients is not required to be labeled unless the end product itself has been irradiated.

Environmental contaminants in the food supply

Hormone disruptors, heavy metals and neurotoxins interfere with our bodies' natural functions, causing a wide array of health problems such as cancer, infertility, thyroid dysfunction, birth defects, behavioral problems and immune system suppression. Scientists have identified more than 65 environmental contaminants believed to impact human health, common among them dioxin, atrazine, styrene, Bisphenol A (BPA), perchlorate, lead, mercury and PCBs. We have detailed a few of these chemicals below.

- **Bisphenol A (BPA).** This chemical, found in many food grade and non-food grade plastics, has been shown in animal studies that exposure may cause reproductive disorders, diabetes and

cardiovascular disease.¹ It is commonly found in plastic food containers, the interior lining of tin cans, plastic bottles, bottle tops and plastic water supply lines. BPA leaches from containers into the food or beverage, especially when heated. It is advised to not microwave or put BPA plastics into the dishwasher.

The FDA currently does not restrict BPA but continues to review its effects. Concerned consumers should seek out BPA-free products and consider swapping plastic food and beverage containers for glass and/or stainless steel alternatives.

- **Mercury** is a neurotoxin that can seriously impair brain development in children if they are exposed to too much of it.² Although naturally present in our environment, industrial pollution has increased the level of methyl mercury in our oceans and waterways. Consuming large predator fish like tuna, swordfish and halibut increases our exposure since mercury concentrates in muscle tissue as it travels up the food chain. Children and pregnant women are advised to limit their intake of these fish.
- **Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)** are a class of manufactured chlorinated compounds that, although no longer manufactured, are persistent in our environment. They have been associated with birth defects and are classified as probable carcinogens.³ They accumulate in animals through water and food supply. Fish, meat and dairy products are all frequently contaminated with PCBs.

¹ "FDA Continues to Study BPA," US Food and Drug Administration, www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm297954.htm

² "Fish: What Pregnant Women and Parents Should Know," US Food and Drug Administration, www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/Metals/ucm393070.htm

³ "Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)," Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, www.atsdr.cdc.gov/substances/toxsubstance.asp?toxid=26