

# Pick Your Poison

**From foreign objects to bacterial contamination, the growing rates of hazards in processed foods are motivation to eat fresh!**

When millions of pounds of food are processed each day, it is not surprising when a contaminant or two finds its way into the food. At minimal levels, these contaminants go unnoticed and undocumented. However, at elevated levels, contaminants can be dangerous or even fatal. Unfortunately, many food recalls do not occur until a number of people have become sick or injured.

2012 had its fair share of recalls and contaminations- notably the alarming arsenic levels in rice that prompted congress to limit arsenic in rice products. 2013 is already off to quite a start in food recalls. According to the U.S. FDA, these foods, among many others, were found to be contaminated:

- Beef lasagna made by Findus was found to contain up to 100 percent horse meat! This discovery prompted a mandatory testing of products containing processed beef by all companies. France and the UK are experiencing similar problems.
- LeanCuisine, distributed by Nestlè Prepared Foods Company, has been recalled for a misprinted "best before date".
- Various dried mushrooms from DZH Imports contain high levels of sulfites that could trigger a fatal reaction in those allergic.
- Frozen Country Fried Steaks became contaminated with foreign particles when a plastic bin found its way into

production, requiring AdvancePierre Foods to recall these items.

- Just when you thought natural food stores were safe, Whole Foods and its seafood division, Whole Catch, have recalled products: bagels with cream cheese, the cream cheese itself and sockeye salmon contained high levels of *Listeria monocytogenes*. A sometimes fatal bacterium, *Listeria monocytogenes* can also cause miscarriage.
- Annie's brand, a company that produces natural and organic boxed and premade foods took their frozen pizzas off shelves because of metal fragments. Metal pieces were also found in bagels by Thomas', Sara Lee, Publix and Weight Watchers.
- A most recent recall is that of Organic Baby Spinach distributed by Taylor Farms Retail Inc. The spinach was found to have elevated levels of Enterohaemorrhagic *E. Coli* (EHEC). Symptoms include intestinal distress, fever, and nausea.

The big surprise in this list is the recall by the natural and organic brands. No mass produced food product is safe from excessive contamination, further demonstration that factory farming, organic or conventional, is a health hazard. Corporately produced foods all pose a potential health risk. The food item is handled too many times by too many people, making it difficult to control quality and safety. Contamination can occur at any point in production, during the growing stage, harvest, processing or shipping. A single item comes into contact with a great many others, spreading contamination rapidly- making the act of investigating the source of contamination a challenge.

Purchasing food from a local farmer reduces the risk of contamination. First, because there is less quantity, it is easier to prevent the introduction of foreign material. Second, because the food is not warehoused for lengths of time with foods from other origins, bacterial contamination from

other food sources is not a factor. Reducing the opportunities for contamination helps minimize the risk of particle or bacterial contamination.

With the risk of oral injury, bacterial infections, and other intestinal ailments, it is amazing that we continue to trust our conglomerate food suppliers. At what point do we abandon factory farming and support our local farmers and a healthier lifestyle?