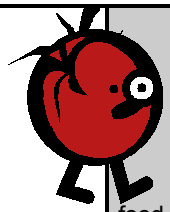
YUMMY NORTHWEST

MARY ROSEWOOD, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER
LESLIE PHILLIPS, COPY EDITOR
KENT, WASHINGTON

WHAT'S IN YOUR FOOD?



It's National Salad Month, and you are enjoying the bounty of spring topped off with a tangy vinaigrette or creamy dressing.

But do you really know what you're eating? Scientists are playing with our food, and few people seem to be asking them questions, such as: What is it? What will it do to me?

The subject of genetically modified (GM) food is a broad one and hotly controversial even among the well-educated people who are conducting the experiments. This issue of **Yummy Northwest** seeks only to bring to your attention some relevant thoughts so that you can make your own decisions about what to eat.

It would be nice to have a national referendum on the subject of nutritious food, or even a mild public demonstration somewhere. But every good thing begins with the good actions of one person, moving on to another person, and another, and another.

You can begin with your own salad bowl. Look at it, and ask yourself: What am I eating? Only you can decide how important the answer is.

What is GM?

Selective breeding of livestock, using yeast to bake bread and ferment wine and beer, and crossbreeding plants have long been ways of modifying food.

During the 1900s, experimenting with molecules became a new form of improving the food supply. Genetically modified food contains a genetically modified organism (GMO). In simple terms, DNA molecules are cut and sliced to add good traits to or subtract bad traits from an organism.

Molecules with good traits can be taken from anything, including animals, bacteria or other plants.

Are you eating GM food?

An estimated 75% of processed food products in the U.S. contain GM food. Labeling is not required, so buyer be aware.

A list compiled by the GEO-PIE Project at Cornell University shows the likelihood that we are eating any of the 12 foods that have been approved by the FDA for genetic modification.

Soybeans – yes
Most of the U.S. crop is engineered to resist an herbicide.
Corn – yes
GM corn is mixed in with regular corn in all products. Fresh corn is usually not GM.
Canola – yes
Found in cooking oil, non-dairy creamers, chocolate, etc.
Cotton – yes
Cotton oil is in many processed foods
Potato – probably not
Taken off the market due to poor sales, but GM sweet potatoes are still available.
Squash – unlikely
Few farmers grow these.
Papaya – unlikely
Half the Hawaiian crop is GM, but mostly exported abroad.
Rice – not yet
Awaiting EPA approval.
Tomato – no
In a few markets 1994–1997, but sales were poor.
Sugar beets – no
Flax – no
Radicchio – no

and...
Salmon – not yet
A fast-growing salmon is being developed.

from **www.geo-pie.cornell.edu/gmo.html**

Genetic modification can create drought- and insect-resistant plants, boost nutrients, and control ripening. Human vaccines are currently produced in eggs or yeast, making them unsafe for people with egg allergies. Experiments are ongoing to see how plants can be used. A vaccine for bird flu is being developed in Australia in tomatoes.

The first GM crop was a tomato that could be picked on a schedule and that spoiled less quickly after harvesting. The FDA approved it in 1992, and it went into some markets in 1994 with little public comment. But it never sold well, perhaps because it wasn't particularly tasty or because people silently protested by not buying it, and it was gone by 1997.

Why is GM an issue?

Intensive studies are conducted on how GM foods affect lab animals. Food companies want to be sure no one blames them for any bad effects, and opponents want to be sure the food companies don't hide anything from the public.

Some modifications have been shown to be unsafe, and the food has never gone into production. But even with GM foods that seem safe now, no one knows what the long-term effects are on human health or the environment.

Few studies have been done to test GM foods inside human beings. What happens when you eat corn with a pesticide-creating gene spliced into it? Will the pesticide flourish in your intestines? No one knows. Even "safe" modified genes can rearrange themselves after several plant generations, with unknown consequences for humans.

Allergies are a known concern. In one example, soybeans with a gene from a Brazil nut grafted in became dangerous for anyone with an allergy to the nut.

Is any food safe?

USDA-approved organic food cannot be genetically modified, irradiated, or grown with synthetic fertilizers or chemicals. You're safest buying from local organic farmers or shopping at whole foods markets, such as PCC.

Ways to eat your words

While scientists research and debate methods of modifying the food supply, other minds are at work looking for ways to use food to keep growing piles of toxic technological refuse out of landfills.

The current display at the Science Museum in London, England, is called Dead Ringers. There you can see how many cell phones are thrown away and the interesting ideas that are being put forward to promote recycling and avoid pollution from toxic materials.

The following food-related photos and details are from a recent BBC Online article.

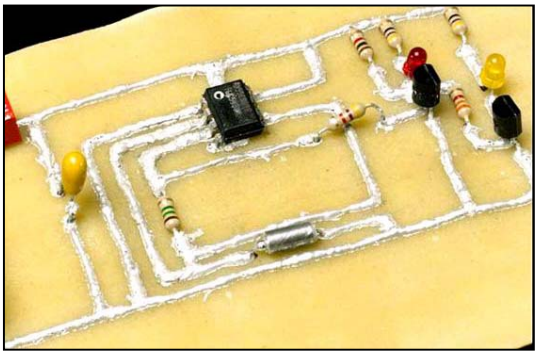
Talk and plant a garden

Biodegradable phone covers, developed at Warwick University, U.K., contain sunflower seeds and can be planted in a garden.

Light as a feather

Keeping in mind the billions of pounds of feathers produced annually by the U.S. poultry industry, researchers at the University of Delaware created a circuit board made of feathers and soybeans.

Add your own sauce



Folks at the U.K. Welding Institute made their own circuit board using lasagna noodles. They are also experimenting with chitin, a starch-based compound found in shellfish.

from **news.bbc.co.uk**, March 30, 2006

Turn milk into plastic

Many plastics are made from petroleum oil, but you can make plastic using milk and vinegar. You probably don't want to eat it, but at least you know what's in it.

You will need:
milk
a saucepan
vinegar

Directions

1. Place some creamy milk in a saucepan and heat until simmering.
2. Slowly stir in a few teaspoons of vinegar.
3. Keep stirring until it becomes rubbery.
4. Let it cool and then wash it under running water.

You now have your own plastic, made from the acid reacting with the organic milk chemicals.

Let **Yummy Northwest** know what you do with your plastic. Perhaps someone can start an edible kitchenware line.

from **www.proteacher.com**

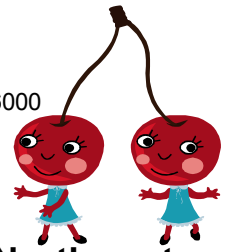
Have you heard the one about the potato clock?

A guy goes into a vegetable shop and asks for a potato clock. The shopkeeper says, "What?" The guy says, "I've just got a new job, and the boss says I've gotta get a potato clock!" You know, "up at eight o'clock"!

That was a bit of humor from funnyman Nick Park. But you really can order a kit to run a clock on two potatoes. Or make your own. Here are two Web sites to get you started:

make your own
pbskids.org/zoom/activities/phenom/potatobattery.html

place an order
www.sciencekit.com/category.asp_Q_c_E_756000



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest. Online at rainydayrose.com.

Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com.