

Food Fraud: Are Your Ingredients at Risk?



By LINDSEY JAHN, Associate Editor, *Food Manufacturing*

Food fraud is on the rise across the globe, and it is impacting all forms of products — from milk and olive oil to seafood and beef. While some cases of food fraud are due to the efforts of unscrupulous processors, some honest food companies are unknowingly producing items containing fraudulent ingredients.

Europe's meat industry has been in crisis mode since Ireland announced that at least one-third of frozen "beef" burgers produced in the country contained traces — or sometimes much more than traces — of [horsemeat](#) [1]. Since then, horsemeat has been detected in many European meat products, from Ikea's signature [Swedish meatballs](#) [2] to prepared meals produced by [Nestle](#) [3].

So far, no horsemeat has been detected in the U.S. food supply. But the U.S. food industry is no stranger to other types of food fraud. The U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention (USP) maintains a Food Fraud Database which identifies cases of food fraud occurring in the U.S. The USP in January released its most recent update to the database, which added almost 800 new records of food fraud, increasing the total number of records published in the database by 60 percent.

The USP defines food fraud as a "collective term that encompasses the deliberate substitution, addition, tampering or misrepresentation of food, food ingredients or food packaging, or false or misleading statements made about a product for economic gain."

According to the latest update of the Food Fraud Database, some of the most commonly "faked" ingredients include the following:

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1. Olive oil
2. Milk
3. Honey
4. Coffee and tea
5. Fish
6. Maple syrup

While it is relatively easy to identify cases of food fraud involving one-ingredient products, such as extra virgin olive oil or honey, finding fraudulent products with multiple ingredients can be a difficult task — especially when the manufacturer may not be aware that it is using a fake ingredient in its production process.

The USP database is designed to help food manufacturers ensure their products are both safe and high quality. “Ultimately, we hope the database can be used as a tool by food manufacturers, regulators, scientists and others worldwide to help achieve a safer food supply,” says Dr. Jeffrey Moore, senior scientific liaison for USP and the database’s creator and lead analyst.

Of particular concern in the U.S. is the growing issue of seafood fraud. Advocacy group Oceana recently released its latest [report](#) [4] on seafood fraud in America. The report states that one-third of the 1,215 fish samples tested were mislabeled, according to FDA guidelines.

Oceana suggests that more traceability efforts are needed to ensure the authenticity of seafood, especially since the majority of fish consumed in the U.S. is imported. “We need to track our seafood from boat to plate so that consumers can be more confident that the fish they purchase is safe, legal and honestly labeled,” says Beth Lowell, campaign director for Oceana.

Regardless of what food manufacturers produce, it is imperative that they ensure the safety, quality and legality of their ingredients. Communicating with ingredient suppliers is of the utmost importance. Companies should obtain information about the ingredients they obtain from their suppliers, including the origin and makeup of the ingredient.

Traceability is also a viable option for processors, especially those utilizing fresh ingredients such as seafood, fruits and vegetables. Many producers in the U.S. now offer both consumers and manufacturers the ability to trace their product “from field to fork.” Knowing the exact path a product has taken can help assure food companies and consumers that they are receiving a quality item.

As the U.S. food supply becomes increasingly complex, it is more important than ever for food manufacturers to take steps to ensure the integrity of their ingredients, in order to produce a safe, quality product for consumers.

What’s your take? Please feel free to comment below!

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Links:

[1] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/02/horse-hidden-ingredient-many-european-foods>

[2] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/02/horsemeat-found-ikea%E2%80%99s-swedish-meatballs>

[3] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/02/nestle-finds-horsemeat-pasta-meals>

[4] <http://oceana.org/en/news-media/publications/reports/oceana-study-reveals-seafood-fraud-nationwide>