



OCTOBER 24, 2011

Ten of the Best and Worst Aspects of America's Food Scene

Terrific Ten

*Improving diets, health, and the environment**

Water—humankind's standard beverage for millennia—from the tap or filtered, carbonated or not, is a far better choice than soda pop and other sugary drinks.

Traditional Mediterranean and Asian diets that are heavy on vegetables and fruit and light on meat and cheese are delicious and reduce the risk of heart disease and other maladies. Plant-based foods also are easier on the environment than animal products.

New York City's health department, backed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, made the city a health leader by banning trans fat from restaurants and bakeries, requiring calories on chain-restaurant menus, pressing industry to lower sodium levels, and bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to food deserts.

Sustainably and organically grown foods build healthy soil and minimize harm to farmers, the environment, and consumers from dangerous pesticides, excess fertilizer, antibiotics in animal feed, and synthetic food additives.

Farmers markets, now more than 7,000 strong, bring fresh, healthful foods to consumers and are a boon to many small farmers.

Federal food programs—SNAP (food stamps), school meals, WIC, and others—are a smart investment in protecting tens of millions of Americans from the ravages of hunger. Anti-hunger groups are now seeking to protect these programs from congressional budget cutters.

First Lady Michelle Obama has inspired Americans to eat healthier diets, plant gardens, and get active and urged companies to market healthier foods, especially for children.

Coalition of Immokalee Workers has challenged—and improved—the inhumane working conditions endured by many Florida farmworkers, showing that persistent, aggressive action can stop injustices.

"Dietary Guidelines for Americans" is the government's sensible nutrition advice that promotes fruits, vegetables, and other nutrient-dense foods and discourages consumption of soft drinks, foods made with white flour, and salty foods.

Breastfeeding is not for everyone, but if you're under one year old, it's the best!

* These lists, which are in no special order, were prepared by the national Food Day office and do not necessarily reflect the views of Food Day Advisors and local Food Day coordinators and participants.

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*Impairing diets, health, and the environment**

Coca-Cola, the most aggressively promoted and widely consumed brand of sugar-loaded "liquid candy" in the world, has contributed mightily to the obesity epidemic. Each can of Coke contains 9 teaspoons of sugars.

McDonald's Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese, a Coke, and Fries typifies many restaurant meals: short on fruit and vegetables, but bulging with calories, salt, saturated fat, added sugars, and white flour, which promote obesity, hypertension, and other diet-related diseases.

Salt, which we overconsume from countless packaged foods, restaurant meals, and salt-"enhanced" meat and poultry, is the single most harmful substance in our diet. Excess sodium causes more than 100,000 fatal heart attacks and strokes each year.

Feedlot beef is unhealthy for humans (saturated fat, raised with antibiotics), harmful to the animals (crowded, filthy feedlots), and environmentally destructive (requires massive amounts of energy and resources for feed, pollution from manure and methane).

Kellogg's Froot Loops, a fruit-less sugary cereal gussied up with synthetic dyes, is one of a host of junk foods marketed heavily to kids. Kellogg is one of many companies seeking to kill the government's voluntary nutrition standards intended to promote children's health.

Jack DeCoster's egg farms, which in 2010 caused a huge outbreaks caused by *Salmonella*, recklessly disregarded consumers' health and dramatized the need for tougher enforcement of food-safety laws to clean up the whole food industry.

Powerful lobbying groups—from the soft drink, meat, food processing, grain, advertising, and other industries—thwart important reforms of marketing to kids, food labeling, farm policies, and other issues.

Subsidies to companies that blend corn ethanol into gasoline, coupled with a mandate to market billions of gallons of that gasoline annually, cost taxpayers \$6 billion a year. Using corn for fuel also leads to higher prices for corn and foods with corn ingredients—all for a program without significant environmental benefit.

White flour—used in bread, pizza crusts, pasta, doughnuts, cakes, burritos, cookies, and dozens of other foods—has spurred the obesity epidemic by adding evermore vitamin-depleted, fiber-poor calories to the diet.

Vending machines dispensing soft drinks and candy are the ubiquitous, mute, metallic monsters that promote unhealthy diets 24/7.