

Conscious Eating: Don't Be Fooled By These 11 Food Frauds



By Gabrielle Van Tassel | [Extra Crispy](#)

In my effort to eat healthier and more ethically, I tend to gravitate towards foods that are organic, non-GMO, and locally grown—hence the \$8 eggs I accidentally bought last week. Have you ever stopped to wonder what those phrases and certifications on food labels actually mean? Remember when Naked got in trouble for [falsely advertising their juice](#) as containing quality, healthful ingredients? And when we found out the [truth behind food labels](#) like cage-free, antibiotic-free, and certified organic? These are examples of [food fraud](#).

[Food fraud](#) is not just when companies fraudulently market their products as something they're not. Dr. John Spink of Michigan State University's Food Fraud Initiative defines [food fraud](#) as “a collective term used to encompass the deliberate

and intentional substitution, addition, tampering, or misrepresentation of food, food ingredients, or food packaging; or false or misleading statements made about a product, for economic gain.” No matter how you spin it, food fraud is shady business.

But without a subscription to [The United States Pharmacopeial Convention food fraud database](#), how do you [protect yourself against food fraud](#)? The answer is, well, it’s hard. There are thousands of ingredients and food fraud records in the database. To help you out, I put together a fairly short list of common foods that you should always keep an eye on.

The most dangerous example of [food counterfeiting](#) is **olive oil**. Olive oil, especially extra virgin olive oil, is the healthiest oil we can eat. However, the hard truth is that according to a study conducted by the UC Davis Olive Center, only 69 percent of [bottles labeled “extra virgin”](#) are actually extra virgin. The harder truth is that manufacturers can cut it with vegetable, soybean, and sometimes a nut oil. That poses a severe health risk for some people with allergies.

Fish is another big source of food fraud. Oceana.org found that 39 percent of [seafood in NYC alone was mislabeled](#). A lot of fancy fish you’re buying could actually be a cheap, bottom-feeding substitute like Escolar instead of Tuna steak. The danger is that Escolar contains indigestible esters that can cause food poisoning and other shitty side effects (pun intended).

As for **ground meat**, you might be getting a mystery animal in your marked package. Remember the [horse meat scandal](#) in England? Lucky for the US, meat substitution is not as common here.

Another upsetting one is **milk**. Never use [powdered milk](#), especially if it’s from China. Worse than drinking a mix of various livestock milk (as in, not just cow), some powdered

kinds of milk can contain chemicals like melamine, urea, and detergent.

Far less terrifying is the wide-spread **fruit juice** fraud. Beyond various companies claiming unproven health benefits on the labels, a lot of juice companies will claim the product is "100 percent juice." The trouble is, that bottle of juice is probably 100 percent juice, but it's not straight grapefruit, pomegranate, orange, or what have you. It's probably cut with something cheap and sugary, like apple juice. Some juices even contain clouding agents to make them look "fresh squeezed." No thanks.

You probably already knew about **honey** and food fraud, but it's one of the worst offenders. Those plastic bears are loaded with additives like high fructose corn syrup, so just stick to your local apiaries.

Coffee is another common one because it's easy to hide other brown things, like twigs, in coffee grounds. Ever wonder why your [pre-ground coffee](#) has a particularly earthy taste? Do yourself a favor and buy whole beans.

Ground **black pepper** is another easy way to dupe consumers, so buy whole peppercorns and a grinder and do it yourself. Freshly ground pepper tastes better anyways.

The next thing you should be scrutinizing is your **vanilla extract**. Vanilla is the second most expensive spice, so it's not surprising that the [extract](#) is made up of vanillin instead. While vanillin is a naturally occurring compound, most commercially sold bottles of extract synthesize it in a lab for cheap.

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