FOOD SCIENCE FACT SHEET

Institute of Food Science + Technology ifst







SHEET NUMBER 19

This Food Science Fact Sheet is one of a series compiled by Institute of Food Science and Technology, providing clear, concise and scientifically reliable information on key food science topics for consumers.

Food Crime: Avoid Being A Victim

What is food crime?

Relates to criminality in the supply of food and drink, which can be seriously harmful to consumers, businesses and the wider food sector.

What is food fraud?

Any deliberate action by businesses, or individuals, regarding the integrity of food to deceive others and gain undue advantage.

What is food authenticity?

It is about ensuring that food offered for sale is of the nature, substance and quality expected by the consumer.

How are we protected?

People can become unintentional victims of food crime, through no fault of their own, but should be reassured that there is support available, via organisations who strive to address the issues as they arise and prevent further occurrence. This fact sheet is aimed at capturing what we can do to protect ourselves.

What are the different types of food fraud?

- **Illegal processing:** e.g. slaughtering or preparing meat, and related products, in unapproved premises or using unauthorised techniques
- **Misrepresentation and counterfeiting:** marketing or labelling claims (text, logos etc.) on a product to wrongly portray its quality, safety, origin or freshness. Can include concealing substandard product
- **Waste diversion:** illegally diverting food and drink, meant for disposal, back into the supply chain
- **Substitution:** replacing a food, or ingredient, with another substance that is similar but inferior
- **Theft:** dishonestly obtaining food, drink or animal feed products to profit from their use or sale
- **Adulteration:** including a foreign substance, which is not mentioned on the product's label, to lower costs or fake a higher quality product.

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FOOD SCIENCE FACT SHEET continued

SHEET NUMBER 19

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How to spot and avoid it

- If the price you are paying seems too good to be true, it probably is
- Read the label to ensure that what you are buying is clearly identified on the product (typos, pixilation etc.)
- Look for packaging changes that do not look right e.g. a slight misspelling, broken seal
- Different from last time (taste, colour etc.)
- Be familiar with foods that are vulnerable to food crime (see Table 1 for examples)
- Choose brands you know or trust
- Shop at trusted retailers and discount stores
- Take care when shopping online.



Food type	Examples	Types of fraud
Herbs and spices (dried)	Turmeric	Adulteration with lead chromate (an industrial dye) makes the spice appear more yellow, thus increasing its apparent value
	Saffron	Addition of: inexpensive and readily available plants, such as safflower; less important parts of the saffron plant, such as stigmas; minerals; artificial colourants
	Oregano	Adulteration with other plant material, such as olive or myrtle leaves
Fish	Salmon, cod, tuna	Substitution e.g. cheaper white-fleshed fish, such as tilapia, served in restaurants and described as cod
Organic foods	Dairy foods, fruits, vegetables	Misrepresentation e.g. conventionally grown foods sometimes fraudulently marketed as organic

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Food type	Examples	Types of fraud
Beverages	Wine, spirits	Misrepresentation: wines may be labelled as originating in a certain region when they did not Counterfeiting: premium spirit brands faked (copied) by unauthorised manufacturers
Dietary supplements	Sports/herbal supplements, natural remedies	Supplements may not contain the ingredients declared on the label or may contain legal substances in quantities higher or lower than recommended. Labels may make misleading claims that are unproven, such as curing a serious health problem. They sometimes contain undeclared pharmaceutical drugs to make them appear more effective, such as sexual health supplements with added sildenafil, or weight loss products containing amphetamines
Honey	Premium/blended	Adulteration: predominantly involves the addition of other cheaper substances, such as sugar syrups and water. These may be accompanied by the addition of other substances to mask the adulteration, such as colours, enzymes and pollen
Olive oil	Extra virgin	Mislabelling: virgin olive oil labelled as extra virgin. Selling oil that does not meet the legal requirements, including marketing oils as coming from a different region than they do Adulteration: mixing with lower quality oils, such as rapeseed (vegetable), sunflower or palm. This can include adding dyes, such as chlorophyll, to improve the appearance

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Food type	Examples	Types of fraud
Meat	Beef, horse, lamb	Substitution and document fraud: in 2013, European beef products found to contain undeclared horsemeat. Horses are sometimes traded and slaughtered, with falsified documents, so that they appear safe for human consumption, even though, in some cases they may have been treated with unapproved veterinary drugs

What to do if you have concerns?

Contact your food safety authority, to report any concerns, for example:

- **England, Wales and Northern Ireland** - National Food Crime Unit confidential hotline on 0800 028 1180 (from UK) or 0207 276 8787 (from overseas) Report a food crime | Food Standards Agency
- **Scotland** - Scottish Food Crime and Incidents Unit's free and confidential hotline on 0800 028 7926 Report a food crime | Food Standards Scotland | Food Standards Scotland
- **USA** - US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Economically Motivated Adulteration (Food Fraud) | FDA
- **Canada** - Canadian Food Inspection Agency Contact us – Canadian Food Inspection Agency - inspection.canada.ca
- **EU** - Agri-Food Fraud Network The EU Agri-Food Fraud Network - European Commission (europa.eu)
- **Australia** - Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Contact us or report an issue | ACCC
- **New Zealand** - Commerce Commission Commerce Commission - Report a concern

Further Reading

- **Understanding food crime and how to report it** Food crime | Food Standards Agency
- **Seven ways to spot counterfeit goods** How to spot counterfeit goods (goodhousekeeping.com)
- **Fake products hold risks of everything from cyanide to rat droppings - making sure the product is real** How to Avoid Buying Fake Products When Shopping on Amazon, Walmart
- **Dangers, symptoms, and spotting fake alcohol** Unsafe alcohol (interpol.int)
- **Definitions and types of food fraud** What is Food Fraud? Unveiling the Types, Impacts and Mitigations (navitassafety.com)

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