



The Black Market in Salt and
What It Means for All of Us

Hatchard Report

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I had a shock this weekend, which has turned into a wake-up call. For years I had been sprinkling Black Salt (Kala Namak) on my avocado toast with its unique sulphurous flavour reminiscent of eggs.

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The traditional texts of Ayurveda recommend it as an aid to digestion. Recently, it has become something of a sensation among Western cooks and chefs seeking new, exciting flavours for their dishes. In the shops, it is often labelled 'Indian Volcanic Salt,' and I always imagined it was mined in some remote exotic place in the Himalayas.

But it is not volcanic at all, browsing the internet I discovered that it is manufactured by [an ancient process using extreme heat](#) to fuse a particular kind of mineral salt with a range of herbs and fruits. The shock came when I discovered that there are only a couple of places left preparing the highly prized salt using traditional methods. Instead, industrial companies are making a look-alike salt that tastes somewhat similar but is, in fact, a blend of chemicals, some of which, such as fluoride, are quite poisonous. Hence, for years I have been unwittingly poisoning myself.

You may comment that perhaps the lack of regulation in the diverse Indian market place is to blame, whereas here in the West we have stricter standards and labelling, but is this the case? Among New Zealand's most prized export products is butter from mostly grass fed cows roaming on green pastures often within sight of snow capped mountains. So far, so good, until you begin to ask how the butter is made. Numerous YouTube videos explain a very reassuring process of churning cream, however more than 90% of butter you find in the shops is no longer made that way.

Giant factories use secretive technologies that more closely resemble margarine manufacture. This involves separating out the different kinds of fat in cream and using only the softer fats to make spreadable butter. [The essentials of this process were discovered in NZ in 1970](#), but only became widely used around 1990, by which time, after much research, a commercially viable industrial manufacturing process had been perfected. So what became of the harder fats? Yes, you guessed it, they were not thrown away. They just might have found their way into ordinary butter.

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Your grandmother might tell you that around 1990 butter no longer performed quite the way it used to in home baking. While those who make clarified butter (ghee) for cooking found that when heated, butter separated into strange layers of milky liquid and greenish fat unsuitable for ghee. No one even informed the public of the switch, and the health implications of the hard separated fat content remains an open question, no doubt uninvestigated and swept under the carpet. Butter manufacturers all over the world now use these techniques aside from the few boutique creameries still traditionally churning.

This has happened despite the fact that traditional churning can be and has been a large scale simple process. It is also very easy to make butter at home. It is the work of just a few minutes to churn room temperature cream using a whisk or kitchen aid and then squeeze out the buttermilk (which can be used in other yummy dishes).

The Global Dairy Industry Didn't Stop There

As vegetarianism became more popular, the use of animal rennet in cheese became a marketing problem. Animal rennet is used to precipitate the curds from milk as the first stage of cheese making. The solution was 'microbial rennet'. It was much cheaper, more readily available, and acceptable to animal loving vegetarians. Microbial rennet is made in a laboratory, and it is so powerful that just a few drops precipitate the solids from the liquid milk. Today almost all cheese throughout the world is made using this so-called 'ethical' microbial rennet. That is progress, right?

Just think, when you eat cheese, you are now ingesting a powerful agent designed in a laboratory to precipitate solids in solution. Well, there are a lot of solids happily performing their functions in solution in our body. We are 60% water. If you have problems with constipation, haemorrhoids, blood clotting, varicose veins, menstrual pains, and other health problems involving congestion or coagulation, you might consider how much commercial cheese you are consuming.

However, you can create fresh cheese at home within ten minutes by heating whole milk (not homogenised milk) to a full rolling boil and then turn off the heat, add a little vinegar, lemon juice, or pure yoghurt. Stir and sieve to create a tasty fresh cheese that is healthy. If you crave the sharp tastes, cheeses like brie or camembert and some European cheeses are still made using traditional methods (but read the labels).

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We like a slice of bread with our butter and cheese, and here, too, the industrial chemists are hard at work. In 1961, the Chorleywood Bread Process was invented, which enabled the continuous production of bread rather than the traditional batch process. This necessitated the introduction of hard fats and some mysterious bread improvers, which has given modern packaged bread that rubbery springy quality which seems to last for weeks.

No problem though, you can buy an automatic bread maker and the machine will make it for you without hard fats. Bread lovers will know about sour doughs and have their favourite artisan shops.

Synthetic Ingredients Approved as Substantial Equivalence

You can see the problem can't you? Industrial scale manufacturers are taking over our food supply and changing it without telling us. Government regulators work hand in glove with such companies. Medsafe lists over 3000 synthetic ingredients it has 'approved' often under a convention known as 'substantial equivalence'. This does not generally involve testing, but instead, if something looks and tastes similar to a natural ingredient or has a chemical composition that is somewhat similar, it is probably OK and therefore approved for general consumption, or is it OK?

A 2019 study in the USA, the country leading the way towards industrial food production and processing entitled "[Burden of Gastrointestinal Symptoms in the United States: Results of a Nationally Representative Survey of Over 71,000 Americans](#)" records that there are over 100 million ambulance visits to ED each year in the US as a result of gastrointestinal (GI) problems. A survey of 71,000 individuals found that during the week prior (yes, just one representative week) symptoms included heartburn/reflux (30.9%), abdominal pain (24.8%), bloating (20.6%), diarrhea (20.2%), and constipation (19.7%). Less common symptoms were nausea/vomiting (9.5%), dysphagia (5.8%), and bowel incontinence (4.8%).

So, our government-approved, highly-processed and adulterated diet might not be so safe after all. There are a number of factors for the wary consumer to consider here. The purity of ingredients (organic farming excludes pesticides), additives, synthetic substitutions, genetic modification, and changes to traditional processes. Lax regulations are allowing all of these to be altered without public discussion or labelling.

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Which brings me back to black salt. I was really disgusted, but then I should have been more alert and less naive.

Supermarkets are now full of processed packaged food that is unhealthy and it is a long list. The Dutch have a saying *"If you want to be happy for a day, get drunk. If you want to be happy for a year, get married. But if you want to be happy for a lifetime, plant a garden."* If you haven't already voted with your feet, you might start with a vegetable patch. If gardening is very new and intimidating, talk to neighbours and friends who can help you get started. Modern civilization began with agriculture, make sure it doesn't end with biotech culture.

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19 February 2024