

Chatting With the Good Dr. Laura Shook  
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Did you read the article “Safety of Beef Processing Method Is Questioned” in the December 31, 2009 edition of New York Times? It seems that injecting beef with ammonia has become an accepted and possibly effective method of removing the E.coli bacteria from hamburger. This method of beef processing, endorsed by the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.), involves liquefaction of fatty trimmings, protein extraction, ammonia gas and the creation of frozen chips which, according to the article, are common additives to much of the ground beef found in fast food restaurants, school lunch programs and grocery stores. The ammonia is considered a processing agent and therefore is not listed as an ingredient on labels.

Adding ammonia to our food to make it safe? Is it just me or is there something wrong with this picture. I found the whole frozen ammonia cow chip visual to be just a little disturbing and quite frankly unappetizing.

I assure you there is nothing appetizing about stomach cramping, fever, bloody diarrhea, vomiting and possible death. For the record, food poisoning is bad and I recommend you avoid it if at all possible. E. coli, salmonella and a number of other nasty bacteria are best kept out of our food. Food quality, food handling, storage and preparation are essential considerations when striving to live a healthy life.

In our home we strive to eat “clean foods” and I’m not referring to a refreshing rinse of household cleaner. No, in our kitchen “clean food” means we know where our food came from and we cooked it ourselves. In the harvest seasons we strive to eat foods produced locally sometimes as close as our back yard. In the winter our standards relax and we select produce and products that are produced in the USA or that at least have an ingredient label we can read and mostly understand. We are what we eat so we want to know what we are eating.

Keith is a vegetarian so ammonia flavored “beef surprise” is not his concern. Me, I am an opportunistvore, when I do eat meat I much prefer modest amounts of locally raised and butchered chicken or buffalo that I have cooked within my own kitchen. I consider myself lucky to live in a region known for agriculture and animal husbandry. The quality and flavor provided by our local farmers, ranchers and the butchers at Yoder Meats has spoiled me for most commercial dining be it sit-down or drive-thru. I won’t say that I will “never” again eat a fast food burger (I try to never say “never” because I never know). However, after reading that article in the New York Times, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is looking like pretty good fast food to me.

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