

Organic Food Safety: Navigating Labels and Finding Local Sources — Interview With Mark Kastel

By Dr. Joseph Mercola

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Hi, this is Dr. Mercola helping you take control of your health, and we have an unusual recording for you today because we had some technical glitches and we're upgrading our recording studio and introduced some new equipment. The new equipment prevented my video from being recorded and the time constraints did not allow us to repeat this podcast. So, we're going to provide it with you anyway without my video feed.

So, you're going to enjoy it. We're interviewing Mark Kastel who is the founder of organiceye.org, and it's a consumer group that's really focused on helping educate individuals about the dangers of those who are claiming to provide organic foods but don't. So you're going to find this conversation quite intriguing and it will be helpful in empowering you to understand the dangers and concerns here and not to blindly trust the organic certification, because there are some clear concerns here that you need to be aware of. So, I encourage you to watch this and enjoy the conversation without my video feed. So welcome, and thank you for joining us today.

Mark Kastel:

Thank you very much.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

All right, so why don't you give us a history of your organization that you're with and how you came about to do this?

Mark Kastel:

Sure. This is the 20th anniversary of Will Fante and I becoming organic industry watchdogs, and it's a shame that this was necessary. OrganicEye is both a corporate and governmental watchdog. Congress, in 1990, passed the Organic Foods Production Act. It gave the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] the responsibility to protect industry stakeholders, so farmers, ethical business people, and eaters, consumers, protect them from unfair competition and fraud. And the legislation itself is really pretty solid and well-intended. Unfortunately, like a lot of things that happen get handed over to the bureaucrats in Washington and the political appointees of both parties, something gets lost in translation.

So, when organics first launched, when we, in earnest, attempted to commercialize the sector in the 1980s, we were attacked by corporate agribusiness. The USDA testified in Congress, they didn't want to regulate organic food. Their patrons, the agribusiness lobbyists, didn't like organics. If organic food is good, that must mean their conventional food was bad.

And so at the beginning, during the Clinton administration, USDA Secretary Glickman said, "It's just a marketing scheme. There's nothing better about organic food." And during the Bush administration they basically monkey-wrenched the program and delayed the regulations from going into effect for a full 12 years. But they really perfected what I would call regulatory capture during the Obama administration, under Secretary Vilsack. And then, once again, Secretary Vilsack is in charge of the USDA during the Biden years.

By then the corporate agribusinesses saw profit potential. It's now over a \$60 billion a year industry. So, they decided to buy out most of the pioneering organic brands and now their desire is to make organic food more profitable and less rigorous in terms of its oversight. So that's where we come in at OrganicEye to watch the watchdogs, watch the USDA, to make sure that they're enforcing the law correctly and call out the bad actors in the industry and shine a spotlight on the really excellent brands out there where you can still find authentic organic food.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yes, it's a good goal. Can you help shed some light on the significant, well-known brands that have given up, essentially, and sold out to big corporate business?

Mark Kastel:

There are really two organic labels out there. The one which we founded upon where a lot of farmers sold things directly. If you buy local food or regionally produced food you buy direct from farmers, you buy at member-owned cooperative grocery stores around the country, there are about 275 or more. If you buy from independently owned stores that these retailers source directly, they know their farmers. If you go to a farmer's market, if you join a CSA, Community-Sponsored Agriculture, where the box of food is delivered right to your neighborhood once a week, it might've been picked 10 hours ago at the farmer's market or a CSA box instead of 10 days ago in Mexico or California.

In all the years I've done this industry watchdog work I've found virtually no fraud on a local level and you're getting food that's more nutritionally dense, fresher, more flavorful. And your dollars stay in your food shed, they're recirculating around your... We call this the multiplier effect. They're circulating around your local economy instead of being shipped off to Arkansas if you buy your organic food at Walmart, or California or Mexico or Turkey or wherever that food is coming from.

So, there are some resources on our website, which is organiceye.org, organic E-Y-E. If you click on Resources, there's a video series, Kastel's Kitchen, what's in my pantry, my secrets over the last 35 years of involvement in this industry, and then there are some FAQs on resources, on how to find that regional and local food.

But to answer your question directly, there are a couple of resources on our website, that video series talks about the best brands. There's also a graphic on our home page at organiceye.org

produced by a professor at Michigan State University who owns organic. And it really is almost every major brand and it's very deceptive. You'll never see General Mills, Cascadian Farm's breakfast cereals, or Glen Muir tomato products. You'll see Small Planet Foods. Doesn't that sound nice? But Dean Foods bought the Horizon label. That's now been sold off a couple different times, Earthbound Farms. Smucker's is giant. They own Santa Cruz juices and Knudsen juices.

So big doesn't necessarily mean bad. There's a couple really large companies, over a hundred million dollars, that we think are really creditable. Eden Foods is a general grocery supplier, all kinds of everything from canned beans, where they actually know their farmers, not just buy from a broker and a piece of paper. How unique is that? And Nature's Path, which is in Canada, but they have plants here in the United States that make granolas and breakfast cereals, these are really high-integrity folks proving that you can be big and still not betray your values.

So, I would look at that Who Owns Organic chart. I would use those other resources, but the closer you can buy to home, you're going to get a lot of rewards in terms of flavor, nutrition and good karma in terms of rewarding the people who get their hands dirty for a living and crack a sweat, instead of corporate investors.

When we were operating, and I farmed organically 35 years ago, certification was voluntary. It was about transparency and that was built into the Organic Farms Production Act that Congress passed. It said, "Organic documents will be available to the public." Unfortunately, the USDA's interpretation was organic document, meaning only the certification document. So it could be from China, it could be from Turkey, it could be from Mexico, it could be from the United States. But the people trading organic food in the wholesale marketplace only are looking at one piece of paper unless you're highly ethical.

As I said, like Michael Potter who owns Eden Foods, he knows his farmers. And so we have to do a lot of digging at OrganicEye to find the source, the actual source, of where this food is coming from. Being secret doesn't necessarily mean it's all fraudulent, but we've helped break some major import fraud, partnering with the Washington Post at one point. We've partnered with the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and, again, the Washington Post on looking at the factory dairies.

There's really two types of improprieties happening. One is outright fraud that I call organic alchemy. It goes on a ship in Turkey, it comes halfway over here and then they switch the paperwork from conventional to organic. That's criminal. There have been criminal prosecutions in the United States, but the people who do this overseas are getting off the hook. There are stronger regulations going into effect that require more documentation before it even leaves the other country. Let's hope that works. And it's really unfortunate because that really disadvantages honest farmers here in the US. And, again, for all of us who pay extra for organic food, we're obviously not getting what we pay for.

The other kind of fraud is insidious and it rests squarely on the shoulders of the politicians in Washington. There are regulations that require cows to graze on fresh grass. I know you're a really strong proponent of grass-fed dairy meat and eggs because of the nutritional profile and the beneficial fats and the omega-3 fatty acid imbalance that most Americans have. And if you manage animals truly organically they need to be out on grass a lot of the time, if not all the time.

Milking cows is a lot more challenging than raising beef, where you could throw them out on the South 40 in the spring and collect them all in the fall. But for our dairy animals it's challenging enough for organic farmers to move them in and out from pasture to a milking facility twice a day. And the average organic farmer, when we've done polling, and we had 30% response to our survey, that's a really high response rate, one cow per acre. That's where you have enough grazing capacity to produce good organic milk. The USDA is allowing some of these farms that milk thousands of cows each, not 50 or 100 cows, allowing them to graze on five to 10 cows per acre in desert-like conditions and not milk twice a day. Some of them are milking three and four times a day and pretending that their cows are getting enough pasture. At OrganicEye, in technical terms, we call that a joke.

But the joke gets better. All this is secretive as far as the USDA goes, but we visit these facilities and then through freedom of information we can access some of the state permitting requirements for CAFOs, concentrated animal feeding operations, or factory farms. Those aren't secret, we can access them. So it tells us that they have five cows per acre or 10 cows per acre, but it also tells us that they're harvesting hay annually off that same acreage. We don't know what percentage of the seasonal crop is stored as hay for winter feeding, but let's pretend it's 50%. That would be-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Mark, Mark, excuse me for a moment, but it seems you wandered really far off the track of my original question and I don't really have an answer. You said it was hard to determine and all the way you've gone around three different rabbit trails.

Mark Kastel:

Okay, okay. Well-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Let's get back to the question that I think people are interested in, about the fraud out there. And you hinted at some components and one of them was you have to be especially concerned if there is a foreign growing partner that's importing their produce or food into the country. China would be, of course, the number one culprit.

So, it would seem that... Maybe walk us through the process of identifying the source of origin of the food. How can one find that? Because it would seem to me that there could easily be over a 50% chance that it's fraudulent because even in the US there's a chance that it's fraudulent and

they're covered. But the penalties for doing this overseas is almost nonexistent in many countries. It's all gain and there's no potential loss.

Mark Kastel:

It's paperwork.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

It's paperwork. There's no transparency. A rubber stamp and a few hundred dollars under the table and you're golden.

Mark Kastel:

Well, yes, we know a lot of countries have endemic levels of commercial fraud like China, like Turkey.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Corruption, yeah.

Mark Kastel:

And we cracked fraud in China and Turkey and the USDA allows the commercial interest to go right back there. So, what you've helped us on recently, and I want to really plug this in our discussion today, is a action alert we have out so that your viewers and your subscribers can take action to protect our own food supply.

When the law was passed, in 1990, it clearly said that to be qualified for organic, unless you were under \$5,000 a year, just some little minute farm, you had to be certified by an independent third party inspection operation that was accredited by the USDA. In other words, audited every year by the USDA to make sure they're carrying out the law. They're failing to do that for many of the imports. So what they've allowed is what's called group certification. Instead of certifying every farm, instead of inspecting every farm, they will allow a group to band together. And when that was conceived, even though it was still illegal when it was conceived, it was for very small landholders doing things like bananas or chocolate or coffee on a half an acre. They couldn't afford to be certified.

I will challenge you that the commercial interests that are making billions could subsidize their certification, but it was supposed to be a cooperative or indigenous village, some cohesive group. Now the USDA is allowing corporate agribusinesses in countries like Turkey, where there's been a lot of fraud, to form a group where the only thing in common with these, it's not an indigenous community, the only thing in common with these producers is they're on the supplier list for this agribusiness and they get their certification and inspection not by an independent certifier that comes in every year, but the agribusiness inspects their own suppliers and is watched by a for-profit, usually foreign certifier.

And so this is illegal. It's unethical. It is literally forcing US farmers out of business. And is our food, when we buy nuts or rice or quinoa or bananas or the things that we can't grow here in the United States, or even many of the things we can, are they really organic? We don't know. "What's the level of fraud?" you've asked me. We don't know. But the potential for fraud is inherent in this system.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

You know better than most. So, you can claim to say you don't know, but you have some suspicion of what that range could be. It seems like it's over 50% in many of these cases.

Mark Kastel:

I don't know that it's that high, but the way I look at it is if you can't depend on something a hundred percent of the time, you can't depend on it any percent of the time.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

At all. Right, a hundred percent.

Mark Kastel:

And so the advantage of going to your farmers' market or buying your food, your meat and milk and eggs, locally is that you could shake hands and look somebody in the eye. And so we have these resources on our website, whether it's the Weston A. Price Foundation, eatwild.org, Local Harvest, the Real Organic Program, there are a bunch of different schemes for connecting people with farmers in their own communities and in their states. Many departments of agriculture around the country, many of the state departments, have a searchable database. On all these resources, you can get the links on the OrganicEye website, you put your zip code in and it will help you connect. So that's the highest level of integrity.

Next highest level to going out in your garden and growing it yourself, which is a wonderful experience, especially if you have kids. And we have a saying here in Wisconsin, "Don't go out to the garden to pick your sweet corn until the water's boiling on the stove." If you want it fresh and flavorful, there's no comparison. But, again, there are these commodities that we need to depend on the commercial marketplace.

Now, one of our members, we're involved in a lawsuit. He's a retired, semi-retired, corporate litigator in Oregon. He's a certified organic grower of hazelnuts. We can grow hazelnuts in the US, but they can't compete with hazelnuts from Turkey, which come from these group certification where the farms are not even being inspected, and it's forcing our Oregon nut growers out of business. We can buy turmeric from Florida farmers or Hawaiian farmers that are all certified and inspected every year, but they're being forced out of business because they can't compete with Fiji and these group certification schemes. So that's why we need your viewership and following to click on that link on this story to put... In two minutes, it'll send a message to your US senators and your congressperson to say this is unacceptable, that we want better food.

I know you've been dedicated as a proponent, in terms of taking control of your health, of the foundational importance of seeking the safest quality food supply, the most nutritious quality food supply. And many of us are willing to pony up more money to do that because we know it's preventative medicine, but we have to be able to depend on the marketplace when we shop.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Mark, can you help me understand the percentages again, of the food that's imported, that is a potential threat, it's coming from other countries and this is the biggest target? So, would you suggest that it's less likely to be coming from produce because of the shipping times involved, or is that not the case? Would it be the packaged foods that are more concerning and highly likely because they can tolerate longer shipping times?

Mark Kastel:

Well, it's basically processed foods.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Fresh vegetables and fruits are less likely.

Mark Kastel:

Fresh vegetables and fruits are less likely, whether they're grown in California or Florida or right here in Wisconsin. And, again, the closer you can get to your grower, the more rewards you're going to get both in terms of integrity and quality.

But, in terms of animal feed, that's been where some of the largest scale fraud that we've cracked has occurred. And I asked farmers who are really great growers, they produce eggs, their chickens are outside on pasture, but unlike ruminants, even the best farmer that literally wrote the book on pastured poultry, and Salad Bar Beef, Joel Salatin, who's a longtime friend, when I've asked him, "In terms of poultry, what percentage of your animals are eating grain in the winter versus the summer when they can be on pasture?" And in the summer, they're still getting about 85% of their nutrition, these birds, from grain because they're not ruminants, they don't eat grass for a living. And they could supplement that and they get much better nutrition in the egg, but they still need grain. And so, I ask egg farmers, "If what you're feeding your chicken isn't organic, is your broiler chicken or are your eggs organic?" And, of course, the answer is no.

And so, the farmers depend on this certification protocol too. And so, some of the largest shiploads of corn and soybeans that are coming in, and some of these are now coming from group certification too, forget about that fallacy where this group certification was designed for these little landholders, they're now... The USDA is now allowing this to be all kinds of commercial products. So, it's really important. Even if we can find most of our food locally, it's really important that we invest our time in sending that action alert message to our congress people and patronizing best brands. So let me put a plug in for a hundred percent grass-finished meats.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

You know, you mentioned Joel Salatin and that brings up a good topic. I've been to his farm. I've seen the way he raises chickens. I've asked him questions on how he feeds his chickens, and you're right, he doesn't give them organic feed, he gives them grain. Now you're incorrect though in saying that the birds need grains. They don't. They need supplemental food. They are not herbivores by any stretch so they need additional foods. The ideal food for them would be insects and bugs, which they could live on, but it's still hard to find that many unless-

Mark Kastel:

Wait, you're going to have to go back. I couldn't hear what you said. The ideal food is what?

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

The ideal food is insects and bugs.

Mark Kastel:

Oh yes, but they're not... Okay.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

That is the food that they should eat.

Mark Kastel:

Let's have this-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

No, let me finish please. So then if you're going to supplement, you do not need to give them grains. And most of the grains that Salatin and most of the other organic chicken farmers feed them are loaded with omega-6 polyunsaturated fats. And these birds are very similar to us in that they don't have additional stomachs that harbor bacteria that can bio hydrogenate or saturate those polyunsaturated fats. So, as a result, the chickens that are fed this food are 400% higher in dangerous linoleic acid, 400% higher.

But there are alternatives to grains. Legumes would be one, peas. Commercially you're going to have to feed them raw, but you can sprout the peas if you have a few chickens at home and you're using them for your family, which is the ultimate. Not everyone can grow half a dozen, a dozen, chickens, but if you can, you can do that, and it's much better to grow them yourself.

That's the ultimate, raising your own chickens, which I do, and I feed my chickens that and you can feed them some barley. And these eggs from chickens that are given these foods have essentially normal levels of linoleic acid, healthy levels, not 400% higher than they should be.

So, you talked about this effort, your action alerts, and seeking to encourage governmental regulatory authority, and I think that's noble, but the likelihood of that being successful, and maybe you can offer some counterpoints, I think it's pretty minimal. And the last entity that I

would trust to ever protect me is the federal government. So, I think it may be less than ideal focus of concentration of efforts to solve the problem.

I think your earlier suggestion to identify local sources of healthy food where the transparency is optimal and not obfuscated by these intentionally deceptive and fraudulent entities that are seeking to use loopholes in the law to scam people to think they're getting healthy food, and they're not.

So, I think the key focus, I believe, is to encourage people to not necessarily grow their own food because that's hard to do. People are busy and they don't have the resources to do that or the knowledge because it takes, as a farmer, ex-farmer, you well know what it takes to grow food healthy. It's not an easy process at all, but you can find people in your community through the resources you have at OrganicEye, and find and support these people. I think that's the strategy because you really want to eat locally. Now, you won't always be able to do it. Doesn't mean you shouldn't consider seeking to change governmental regulation. I just think that's the biggest source of the fraud. I mean, they're not trusted. You cannot trust these people. Even if you were able to successfully pass it, the likelihood of them successfully enforcing it is questionable.

Mark Kastel:

Well, Dr. Mercola, I mildly disagree with you. I say, "Who owns the organic label?" We do. We own the label. They're betraying us. They're betraying our value. This was a values-based industry when it was founded. And I share your skepticism in terms of trusting what happens in Washington, but I'm saying we're going to make a statement here. And, again, we have to, for at least some of our food, depend on the commercial marketplace, for better or worse.

I, along with other organic farmers in the 1980s, lobbied Congress to pass this law. So, to be able to use the word organic on a label, you have to be certified and it has to be under the USDA. Now, in the case of these group certifiers overseas, they're letting people get away with not even meeting the same standards and adhering to the laws that our US farmers are adhering to. So, this is a real betrayal to not only us as eaters, but to the hard-working people who produce the very best food. We can't let them be injured.

But in the meantime, as you're suggesting, we should seek out local foods. And I would say that, yes, our time is at a premium, but people gain so much meaning and pleasure out of producing their own food. And since inflation has kicked in, really in the food sector, including organics, it gives us a financial incentive to produce our own food. A lot of people find it really enjoyable and as hard as people are working and as much as they're stressed, it's a way to check out for a little while and be out in nature and out in your backyard and has a lot more rewards than mowing a lawn if you want to convert some of your backyard to growing your food.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah. So, getting back to the organic label, I think it's well-intentioned and certainly from very noble purposes to have some sort of outside independent certification agency to do the due

diligence hard work that we really should do ourselves but don't have the time to do. I mean, ideally we should know who's growing our food, but very few of us have that opportunity to do it. Some do, of course, some grow their own, but that's few and far between. So, it's a capitulation of sorts that this is the best they can do.

Any time that you submit to governmental authority you are at major risk. And I don't think we have to look very far back, just the last few years, to see what the heck they did with COVID. They just changed the rules a hundred percent. You cannot trust. This is not a trustworthy organization. They lie, they cheat, they steal, they're fraudulent, they're deceptive, they're propaganda. They brainwash you. How on earth could you ever, ever even consider trusting a governmental authority? I would never trust them for anything, ever.

Mark Kastel:

Well, way back when, in the '70s or in the '80s, when we were independently certified there was a lot of unequal treatment of the word organic on a label so we needed a mediator. Now, because of your reservations and because of our experience over 20 years watchdogging in the industry we need to take the law back into our own hands. And so, one of the things we'll be doing this fall is publishing a list of certifiers, not the list of all the certifiers without qualification that the USDA says they're all great, but we will separate the ones that are betraying our interests and have documented conflicts of interest or taking money from the people they certify. That's illegal. The USDA is letting them get away with that also.

And then we'll have a list of certifiers that if you see that name on the package, and here's the kicker, every package that has the word organic on it must have the disclaimer and say which certification group is certifying it. So that gives us a lot of leverage that if we're educated consumers and we see the right certifier's name on there, we know that we can be much more trustful that the due diligence is being done to assure us that it's really organic. If we see one of the corporate friendly certifiers on there, it doesn't necessarily mean it's fraudulent, but we better do some more homework or change brands to one of the more trustworthy brands.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well, I'm not sure that's a good strategy because you've inputted a whole lot of steps to take. First of all, action to go and have the government consider making these changes. So, in the best-case scenario, they may and they very well may with this legislative effort you're suggesting, but then they may not. And if they do, then you have more potential threat that they're going to, through graft and captured agency, which you freely admitted initially, these agencies are captured, they're a hundred percent captured. They can easily change the rules and allow people to get away with things that they shouldn't. You can't trust the government.

Mark Kastel:

Well, over my dead body.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, well, it very well may be your dead body.

Mark Kastel:

It might be. So, like I say, we own that label and there really isn't a good marketplace alternative. So, we're in court right now, we're in federal court, over this group certification program. So, we're not letting them get away with it. So, we're forcing this transparency.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

It rarely is a successful effort when you sue the government. I know, I've tried it. I've done it a few times.

Mark Kastel:

Yeah, well.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

It doesn't typically... You usually wind up with a lot of legal bills. And they control the system. This is their game, not ours. So, I think you're barking up the wrong tree. The earlier stuff you said about really encouraging people to buy locally, that's the effort, that's the way they have to do it. And then maybe it's a non-governmental certification, but even those have potential for fraud. You just have to be careful.

Mark Kastel:

Absolutely.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

I think the ultimate is that you have to do your due diligence. Ideally you need to know your farmer or trust someone implicitly who does. It's a community effort. When you delegate that responsibility to government, you are just asking for trouble. You are just asking for it.

Mark Kastel:

Yes. And that's why we're intervening, but, again-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Noble interventions, but I don't think it's going to do squat.

Mark Kastel:

But as much as I really join with you and want to encourage people in doing their research so they can buy the maximum amount of food locally, I had a roast chicken. It came from a local producer. The chickens are outside, they're living a happy chicken life. They're way more flavorful and nutritious. But I had some brown rice with my chicken last night along with the locally produced vegetables. We don't grow rice in Wisconsin. This rice, I think, came from California. I need to trust that certification system because I can't meet that farmer.

So that's where we can have a hierarchy on how we choose our food. If we were going to have our own food pyramid, growing our own would be at the top, our local farm, the farm stand, the farmers' market, the CSA box, then maybe that local retailer that has, so we don't meet the farmer, but we meet the person who knows the farm, and organic certified would be on the bottom of that pyramid. So, for the things we can't buy, I have a little bit of unsweetened chocolate every day for the antioxidants, and it's my drug of choice and I can't get that from my local market. So, we still need that duality of how we choose our food.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

I might offer a suggestion on the chicken with the brown rice. Even though it was locally grown and potentially probably organic, again, very few organic chicken farmers know what they're doing. It's a very, very tiny minority, probably under 5%, maybe as low as 1%, because they're feeding them grains, high linoleic acid. So not only was your chicken no different, maybe slightly different because you're getting less pesticides and insecticides and other hormones and chemicals, but with respect to the fatty acid composition, which is really vital and crucial to human health, you really have to have low linoleic acid content. So usually the only animals or the best animals that you should eat would be ruminants because ruminants have this additional compartment that harbors these bacteria which is able to saturate the polyunsaturated fats so they can eat the grains and they wouldn't have really high fat linoleic acid, omega-6 fats in their tissue, because they can biohydrogenate it.

So, the ruminants would be better. But a bigger mistake is eating brown rice instead of white rice. Now, I know you're probably thinking, "Oh my gosh. Why would I do that because the minerals and all the other micronutrients are in the bran? I got to have brown rice." Well, the problem with it, there's a lot of other fibers and materials in that brown rice which absolutely trashes your microbiome.

How does that work? Because almost everyone, 99% of the people in this country, have insulin resistance and insulin resistance causes mitochondrial dysfunction which decreases intracellular energy, which then impacts the ability of your gut to stay healthy. It cannot remove the oxygen in your colon. As a result of that, these organisms, these obligate anaerobes, these oxygen-intolerant beneficial bacteria start to die. They become replaced with pathogenic, facultative anaerobes, which are tolerant to oxygen and they make this really vicious, vicious endotoxin which gets produced. And when you eat things like brown rice, that fiber in that brown rice just... It's like adding a spark to a fire. It causes massive production of endotoxin. It makes you sick. Brown rice, there's virtually no one who does well with brown rice. It should be avoided by almost everyone. It's just not a healthy food.

White rice is completely different. It's one of the healthier foods because it doesn't have these fibers in there that are going to cause those pathogenic bacteria to grow and multiply. And I would doubt if you're in the 1% of the population that has a healthy gut microbiome. And that's pure speculation. But from the studies I review that's what it suggests. And we're actually creating a test to actually identify the microbes. There's about a dozen of these obligate anaerobes that are ideally designed to be the primary constituents of your microbiome in your

large intestines, your colon, and many people don't have hardly any of them. And these are very sick people. These people can't eat almost any foods without having a severe reaction.

Mark Kastel:

Well, I'm not going to dispute anything you just said because you are the master of looking at some of these investigations, but if you're going to eat white rice I want it to be organic.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

A hundred percent. You got that. We're in complete agreement, no question.

Mark Kastel:

Rice is-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

And even then you have to be careful because it's still... Organic rice depends on the ground it is grown in because it can be organic and still be high in arsenic.

Mark Kastel:

Yes. Well-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Arsenic is not something they put on as a... It's in the soil, and in rice it's particularly concentrated.

Mark Kastel:

Two different things here. Rice is very agrochemical intensive. So if you're going to eat rice, brown or white, and you might convince me to switch to white.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, I would hope you do. And come on, you cannot, there's no way you can think brown rice tastes better than white rice. No way.

Mark Kastel:

Someday we'll talk about wild rice that we have in northern Wisconsin.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well, wild rice is good too. Wild rice has been... But I would still be careful of these fibers.

Mark Kastel:

Yes, I understand. So, the arsenic, incidentally, is both organic and inorganic arsenic. So, at one time they grew cotton on a lot of the ground that's used for rice cultivation today and they used synthetic, or inorganic, arsenic as an insecticide. And that's a very persistent chemical.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

That's the etiology of that.

Mark Kastel:

But there are soils that contain organic arsenic. And we've been looking at this for years to try to figure out if there is a truly safe way to grow rice where there can be a higher level of assurance. Because as you know, a lot of these processed baby foods or infant formulas and toddler foods contain a way disproportionate amount of rice and rice sweeteners and all kinds of things that can be really deleterious to your health, and processed food, period. And so at any rate, a very thought-provoking discussion here. Thank you, Dr. Mercola.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well, my whole process is finding the fundamental reasons why people get sick, addressing those reasons and allowing their body to repair and regenerate itself because I believe each and every one of us has the capacity to do that as long as we are addressing those fundamental causes.

And the fundamental causes are not too many. They're really just quite a few, actually. I mean quite a few, remarkably small numbers. I mean, typically it's these phytoestrogens, these xenoestrogens and estrogen itself are one of the three big ones. And then you've got the linoleic acid along with EMF which is a recent, almost 21st century, industrial pollutant. It did exist in the 20th and even the 19th, but, for the most part, they're relatively small amounts.

But when you do those and then you cause the disruption in the gut microflora, that is probably the most pernicious, this endotoxin. Probably trumps all of the rest of them put together because it creates a black hole. I call it a black hole, self-perpetuating cycle of a black hole that just continues to get progressively worse that very few people are ever able to escape it. They can never reach their ultimate longevity potential because they have a compromised microbiome.

Mark Kastel:

Well, maybe you can speak to that in consort with the synthetic food additives and the agrochemical contamination to our food which is acting as a biocide within our guts.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

More specific... It's doing that for sure, but it's also, most of these biocides are what's called EDCs or endocrine disrupting chemicals. And almost all of them activate the estrogen receptor and destroy mitochondrial function. That's the way these things work. Like pesticides, like DDT [dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane], that's the way it works. It's an estrogen receptor activator. That's the way these molecules work. So really simple fundamental mechanisms.

That's why I'm so passionate about this like you are because there's no question that eating organic is crucial. It's essential. You really want clean food. You do not want contaminated biomolecules or inorganic molecules in your food. You want the highest quality. That's your best

chance of your gaining your health back. But it has to be done wisely. And in light of the fact that we have virtually each and every one of us has a compromised, seriously compromised health, in most cases not because of foolish choices that we've made, because we've been brainwashed, propagandized, by the industry and the healthcare professionals and the ostensible public health authorities to believe nonsense, absolute baloney, malarkey that perpetuates this whole biological disaster and our inability to break out of it.

Mark Kastel:

Well, that's why I really appreciate your plug for eating beef or lamb or meat from other ruminants because that's the easiest livestock product and the most nutrient-dense proteins that we can get where we can... I'm looking out at the pasture on my farm, through my office window. We can't eat grass. And I like to say that the entire grazing movement is a solar-based food production system.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

I agree.

Mark Kastel:

Whereas conventional meats and eggs and milk is a petrochemical based production system, both the fuel inputs, the chemical inputs. And so basically these ruminants with the multiple stomachs can digest that and convert that into a product that we can eat. And, very importantly, forget about these giant feedlots about shipping grain in from former Soviet states across the ocean, organic grain, to feed these animals in the feedlots. This is very easy to be done on a decentralized basis. I guarantee you that every one of your followers, if they go to organic.org (organiceye.org) and use our resources, can find local 100% grass-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Excuse me, it's organiceye.org, isn't it?

Mark Kastel:

What did I say? I'm sorry.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

You said, "organic.org."

Mark Kastel:

Yeah, I'm sorry, organiceye.org, organic E-Y-E dot O-R-G. Thank you, Dr. Mercola. And so, it's very easy to do this on a local basis where they have made it impossible to find, other than industrialized food if you go to a store, this is something that you can take control of. And Americans eat way too much meat, really bad meat. So we should be eating half the amount of meat probably, but paying twice as much for it and getting more enjoyment and mixing that meat with good fresh vegetables and other diversified...

I know you're interested in carbohydrates these days, interested in a good mix of food, but be very aware that when people say, "grass fed," whether it's dairy or meats, that almost all livestock are getting grass. Take beef, for example. The first year in a cow-calf operation the mother and the calf are out on pasture. Then they bring them into a feedlot and fatten them up.

So be careful of this shady language that, "Oh, yeah, we grass fed our beef." You want 100% grass fed and grass finished, not finished on corn in a feedlot because most of these cows are sick. In almost every religious vernacular, you know that we've been cautioned against eating sick animals. So, these cows are mostly morbidly obese in feedlots, diabetic, fatty livers. They would never live out a normal lifespan. They're being force-fed this very unnatural diet including expired Twinkies and baked goods and, literally, garbage and chicken litter, the droppings of chickens in the straw with the manure, with the wasted feed from factory farm chicken production. They're feeding that to cattle. This is outrageous. If you partner with a local farmer that is truly grazing a hundred percent grass, you're getting a much safer, nutritionally superior product and it's worth your effort and money.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, it's relatively easy to do too. So, we agree on most of the things. I just have a pretty vigorous disagreement on using the government for protecting yourself and your family.

Mark Kastel:

Well, we have no choice right now because-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well, we always have a choice. Everyone has a choice.

Mark Kastel:

Name me another way to access the marketplace. Regenerative was a really hot term, but, just like sustainable, the corporations have taken that and now we have the big corporate agribusiness practicing regenerative agriculture using herbicides on the ground. That's not regenerative. That's not organic. But that word isn't regulated like organic is. So, we have legal levers and I know you think we're probably not going to win, but I refuse to-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well, you can fight. Yeah, but we agree on other things too.

Mark Kastel:

Yeah. I refuse to hand that over.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

I like your comment on the fact that we don't eat that much meat. I thoroughly agree with you. I eat probably a pound of meat in 10 days. That's how long it takes me to eat a pound of meat. And I think one of the best meats you can get, and thankfully it's probably one of the least expensive,

it's ground beef. Now, it doesn't taste necessarily as good, but it's one of the healthiest. And you know why it's one of the healthiest?

Mark Kastel:

You tell me?

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Because it has connective tissue. It has collagen because they throw parts that are not of the muscle meat. They put that in there. The collagen, the connective tissue that is sinewy, the tendons, the ligaments, parts of the joints. This is good food. One third of our protein should be collagen connective tissue. Do you know how much collagen the average person eats? Say you're eating 120 grams of protein, which is a fairly common amount, 120 grams. How much grams of protein as collagen does the average person eat?

Mark Kastel:

I bet you not much.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Zero to one gram. Zero to one gram.

Mark Kastel:

Well, I know you're a big-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

The average, I'm not saying everyone, the average person. I'm eating about 40 grams.

Mark Kastel:

Sure. I know you're a big proponent of bone broth.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yes, huge.

Mark Kastel:

And, again, you want to make sure it comes from organic, grass-fed animals. You can chew on your chicken bones, you can use those beef bones, which are waste material, because most people don't appreciate this yet so when you find your local beef producer, you can buy bones from them on the cheap. And the same thing with organ meats. You can buy those on the cheap because nobody wants them and they're very nutritious.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

They're still expensive. There's still a cost to them because I buy them every month. I have a person who delivers them to my house and I'm sure you can find someone to do that for you too.

Mark Kastel:

Well, you're in Florida. You're in Florida. Everything is expensive down there.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah. So, I've got dogs and that's all they eat. They eat a lot more meat than I do, that's for sure.

Mark Kastel:

Well, they're carnivores, omnivores, right?

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, but I still feed them rice. They need carbohydrates too. Pretty much most people need carbohydrates.

Mark Kastel:

Well, God bless you for feeding real food to your animals because it's hard to do but the benefits are immense.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, they eat as well as I do. They eat the same food I do. Why would I give them anything different, right? But I wanted to mention something that you may not be aware of. I'm very curious because you're a really astute, knowledgeable person in this industry. Do you know the dangers of cheese?

Mark Kastel:

I don't know which danger you're talking about.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

The biggest danger of cheese, why almost no one should eat the cheese?

Mark Kastel:

I guess you're going to have to tell me.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

It's the perversion of the enzyme that is used to make most, not all, cheeses, but most cheeses. And that's rennet. The rennet catastrophe. Are you familiar with it?

Mark Kastel:

Well, there's synthetic microbes that they're using right now, but you can't-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Right now? They've been using it for 30 years.

Mark Kastel:

Yes, for a long time. But you can get real cheese made with rennet, which is an animal product.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yes. That was the point I was seeking to make. It's a small percentage of cheese and it's called animal rennet. Simple as that. And, if your label doesn't say animal rennet, you want to-

Mark Kastel:

Well, if it just says rennet, you're okay because they-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

No, no, I don't think so.

Mark Kastel:

On the label, legally, I believe they have to say microbial enzyme if it's not rennet. So, if it says rennet I think you're pretty safe and-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

I would be very careful because certainly I've known many, many people who call the company because they don't even list it and they greenwash it. You know what their answer is? "Oh, we have plant-based rennet." Plant-based.

Mark Kastel:

Right, they call it vegetarian rennet or something.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Vegetarian rennet. So, I would be really careful unless it says, "animal." If you see, "animal rennet," you are golden. And if you don't see it, you can call the company and ask. Some of them may give you the information, some of them may not, but-

Mark Kastel:

It's just-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Now fortunately, Whole Foods actually does a job. They actually label their cheeses with this. They have them in different sections. You can find it. I'm not a big fan of Whole Foods, but kudos to them for doing this because it's a very confusing area and most people have no clue this is a very dangerous additive. It is not insignificant. It causes many people problems. It caused me problems for decades before I learned about this from Ashley Armstrong, the founder of Angel Acres.

Mark Kastel:

Well, it's just as insidious as saying vegetarian eggs because-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

That's some of the worst.

Mark Kastel:

Right. Earlier in this conversation you talked about the bugs and the worms and the other, and sometimes chickens will even take a mouse or a mammal. And so, we're depriving these chickens that are raised in captivity of a natural diet that's healthy for them and ends up being healthy for us. And so, this is all expedience in terms of manufacturing processed food on a mass scale. And that's why, again, locally procured even cheeses will oftentimes be your superior option.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

And the other benefit that you were promoting and encouraging people to get the grass fed, and from a perspective of the omega-6 fats, there's not much of a difference really in omega-6 fats in grass fed or grain fed animals because of their ability to hydrate or saturate those fatty acids. But where there is a difference, a huge difference, is in these odd chain saturated fats. Have you heard about those, like pentadecanoic acid?

Mark Kastel:

Yes.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

So, these are now considered the first nutrient in 75 years to consider being an essential nutrient, essential fat, very similar to omega-6 and omega-3. They are these odd, short-chain fatty acids and they're only there when the animals are eating plants because that's the source of these odd-chain fats, you don't get them from anything else. So you don't get them from grains, you get them from the plants.

Mark Kastel:

Well, when I first started reading your newsletter, many years ago, it was because you were on the cutting edge of doing many of these investigations and not just taking the word of medical science on low fat diets, on seed oils, on saturated fats. And we're getting smarter, but it's going full circle. And that's why truly organic production and, as you're encouraging, grass-based meat and eggs and milk production is really going full circle. Why would we think we were smarter than the creator who came up with this unique interrelated ecosystem that feeds us? And we're so benefited that the most dangerous thing are now these meat analogues and cultured meat using genetically engineered yeast to create, quote, "to create" these food products in sterile, stainless-steel laboratories. It's a prescription for health disaster.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

But the biggest reason that I think they're so dangerous is the fat that they're using. They're not using the saturated fats. They're using seed oils. Seed oils is the primary fat in making these fake meats. Omega-6 linoleic acid content is through the roof in many of these things. They're very, very dangerous. They will kill you prematurely, no question.

Mark Kastel:

Yes. And they're not doing the due diligence in terms of scientific research. They're going to convert this to 300 million plus guinea pigs or lab rats, your children, in this marketplace. And so we should be very cautious. And it's a Ponzi scheme because the big incentive is not because there's something wrong with meat. The big incentive is you can't patent meat and the profit potential, just like in some of these imitation milks, you have a handful of soybeans and water and they're selling it for more than conventional milk and almost as much as organic milk.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Almonds or oats. You don't want plant milk. That's one of the worst things you can do.

Mark Kastel:

Well, high in sugars, low in protein, high in-

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Well sugar's not necessarily the problem, it's the fats.

Mark Kastel:

High in omega-6 fatty acids because of the oils they incorporate. So, at any rate, the reason they develop these, Dr. Mercola, is economic, not because they're developing something that's healthier.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Of course.

Mark Kastel:

Healthier for their bank accounts.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Right. We got to tie things up now, but I just wanted to make one slight correction. When you were talking about grass-fed, you said, "Grass-fed eggs," that doesn't work.

Mark Kastel:

No, no, sorry.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

There's no grass-fed eggs. We went over that before, but... Chickens are not herbivores.

Mark Kastel:

There are people who will maximize that opportunity for them to be on a diverse, healthy pasture and the eggs will be superior.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

That's why you got to take a look at the videos from Angel Acres farm.

Mark Kastel:

I'm looking forward to that.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Oh my gosh, the chickens, they do not have to rotate them because there are on hundreds of acres of three- foot-high grasses, and specifically grasses that are high in these odd-chain saturated fats, which is crazy. There's tall fescue and these other-

Mark Kastel:

It sounds like artistry, and we should be educating people on this issue.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

That's what we're doing. That's what we're doing. Yeah, for sure.

Mark Kastel:

Great.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

All right, well, so, again, you've compiled a wealth of resources at your fantastic site, organiceye.org, E-Y-E. And if you have any interest in learning more about this, I would strongly encourage you to go there. Mark is not selling you anything. His is a labor of love. He's seeking to only help you identify the healthiest foods you can and avoid the pernicious toxins that are in conventional foods and used to increase the producers of this food's bottom line, and not your health. So, you really want to pay careful attention to this if you value staying healthy.

Mark Kastel:

And at organiceye.org we have a free newsfeed that you can sign up. If you want to track these issues, sign up. We need your help. You're our intelligence agents out there. We learn from you too so please engage.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

Yeah, for sure. All right, well thanks for all the work you're doing, Mark.

Mark Kastel:

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Mercola:

It's a really noble effort and I appreciate all your help.

Mark Kastel:

Thanks for having us.

