

David vs. Goliath: The Food Safety Version

When my kids were little, I conscientiously bought and fed them beautiful, bright orange farm-raised salmon at least once or twice a week. In the late nineties, it was an amazing value at seven or eight dollars a pound. I could squeeze heart healthy fish into my tight food budget and feel confident I was feeding my family well.

Imagine my shock when in 2003, I read three major grocery chains were being sued for deception and unfair business practices because they were selling but not labeling [salmon that were fed artificial chemicals](#) to enhance their color. Farm-raised salmon, I learned, is the color of asphalt because of the diet they are fed. Savvy food producers figured gray salmon would be a tough sell so they secretly laced their diets with dye.

But that was not the end of the salmon scandal. The next year Center for Science in the Public Interest published an article showing how to calculate your increased risk of cancer over a lifetime based solely on the amount of farm raised salmon you consumed. The stuff was loaded with toxins. My conscientious food choice was a bust, to say the least.

Since then it has been one mind numbing food scandal after another from pink pus in beef to adulterated olive oil to arsenic laced rice to Round-Up residues in grains. In the end, it feels like you may as well just eat chocolate since the so-called good foods all seem to be contaminated. That is, until we find out that chocolate is laced with monkey hormones or some other completely unpredictable new horror. I made up the monkey hormone scenario but didn't you pause for a second and wonder if it was possible? We have been subjected to so much food perversion, like bacteria genes in popcorn, that we believe anything is possible. In that discouraging frame of mind, I sat down and started reading Malcolm Gladwell's latest masterpiece, *David and Goliath*. It is a book about the triumphs of outliers and underdogs. Three chapters in, I realized the big food companies are Goliath and we, the lowly consumers, are the Davids. And they are the misbehaving out of control teenage version of Goliath. They want what they want when they want it and have no qualms about being sneaky or underhanded to get their way.

David did not win against Goliath by playing by the giant's rules and we are never going to have safe food with production transparency by playing by the industry rules. They want us to pass legislation, fund research and prove the untested chemicals and processes they employ are unsafe. Of course, every attempt to do this is stomped to smithereens by bigger and better funded efforts to the contrary. Witness the big stomp over GMO labeling. Attempts to label genetically modified organisms (GMO) were defeated in two states (Washington and California) even though a vast majority of consumers said they wanted clear labels. Vermont passed a GMO labeling law that cannot even go into effect unless states surrounding it pass a similar law and the lawsuits to stop them have already been filed. We have to accept big food manufacturers are bigger and badder than we are and making them behave is going to require some very clever thinking outside the box. Ideas, anyone?