

Is ‘uncured’ bacon really nitrate-free?

Over the past decade, bacon has seen a surge in popularity. Some call it [“Bacon Mania.”](#)

Once vilified in the health-conscious 1980s as an unhealthy indulgence, bacon is now celebrated in American culture.

Taking to heart that “everything is better with bacon,” bacon-lovers pushed “Bacon Mania” to new levels with the creation of bacon-flavored mayonnaise, alcohol and chocolate. Multiple cities around the country even hold annual Baconfest celebrations.

Bacon sales have jumped 27 percent in the past seven years from \$3.2 billion to \$4.4 billion, [according to market research firm IRI](#). That growth appears to be continuing, with sales increasing 3.5 percent between July 2016 and July 2017, [according to IRI](#).

Bacon is not just a breakfast food anymore, either. A growing number of restaurants, most notably McDonald’s, are embracing the concept of all-day breakfast.

Bacon’s strongest growth, though, has been seen on dinner menus.

Citing research firm Datassential, [The National Provisioner’s 2017 State of Bacon report](#) states bacon penetration at dinner has increased by 6 percent during the past year and 8 percent compared with four years ago.

Bacon’s lunch menu penetration is up 6 percent in the past four years, according to Datassential.

Cancer concerns

As with any rising star in American culture, though, bacon has been increasingly scrutinized.

In 2015, the bacon industry was rocked by [the World Health Organization’s findings](#) that curing bacon with nitrites or nitrates can lead to the formation of potentially cancer-causing chemicals called nitrosamines.

Just 50 grams, or two slices, of bacon per day can increase the risk of colorectal cancer by 18 percent, according to the WHO report.

This announcement was based on more than just a handful of studies.

Before presenting their conclusion to the World Health Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer formed a working group of 22 scientists from 10 countries to review more than 800 studies linking nitrites to colon cancer.

Truth and transparency in ‘uncured’ bacon labels

In response to consumers’ demands for nitrate-free bacon, some meat processors have started curing their bacon with celery juice or even cherry juice powder.

Major bacon brands now label their high-end bacon products as uncured, with this required disclaimer: “no nitrates or nitrites are added, except for those naturally occurring nitrates and nitrites in celery powder.”

These uncured products give the appearance of being more natural than traditional curing processes, but they actually contain just as much sodium nitrate as the other cured bacon brands — and sometimes even more.

As far back as 2007, meat science experts Dr. James Bacus and Dr. Joseph Sebranek wrote that a more appropriate regulatory term for meats cured with celery juice and other nitrites would be “naturally cured.”

Bacus and Sebranek argued that, by changing the label requirements, consumers would no longer be deceived by labels claiming these products are “uncured” and that “no nitrates or nitrites (are) added.”

The confusing labeling practices of uncured bacon products have been exposed in [Time magazine](#) and other major media outlets. It’s only a matter of time before consumers start to push back on this practice.

Social media users have the power to share information, organize to take collective action, and more recently, expose and topple established empires. It’s only a matter of time before consumers start to demand honest labeling for their bacon.

Even if not required by the government, studies show that consumers are more likely to develop brand loyalty with a company that is honest and transparent about their ingredients.

Two-thirds of customers believe the responsibility for providing information about food should come from the brand or manufacturer, according to a Label Insight study conducted in 2016.

In that same study, 94 percent of consumers said, “It is important to buy from transparent brands and manufacturers.”

A more transparent solution emerges

As awareness spreads about nitrates in bacon, it's inevitable that American consumers will start demanding bacon processed without concentrated nitrites.

Irish food manufacturer Finnebrogue, for example, was praised in [The Guardian](#) and [Daily Mail](#) when its nitrite-free Naked Bacon hit U.K. shelves in January 2018.

Finnebrogue's Naked Bacon is processed with Prosur T-10, a blend of extracts from Mediterranean fruits and spices that has proven antimicrobial and antioxidant properties.

Prosur T-10 has been tested by private labs and universities to have less than 1-4 parts per million of residual nitrate and nitrite on average. The biggest distinction being that T-10 allows processors to eliminate concentrated nitrite sources such as prague powder and celery juice powder.

To accomplish this, Prosur, a Spanish company, uses polyphenol and flavonoid antioxidant solutions. These proprietary blends provide a longer shelf-life, pathogen protection, color stabilization and prevent lipid oxidation — all while still providing great flavor, smell, and appearance.

As more people learn about Finnebrogue and the growing number of bacon brands using Prosur T-10, consumers will vote with their pocketbook to make healthier bacon a reality in their lives, their grocery stores and their restaurants.

The future is honest, nitrite-free bacon

Statistics show consumers are already taking notice of clean-label products using Prosur T-10.

"Nitrate-free" bacon saw 14.1 percent volume growth between March 2016 and March 2017, according to [The National Provisioner's 2017 State of Bacon report](#), citing Nielsen Product Insider.

These "nitrate-free" products, which mislead paying customers, have not seen the same level of growth as "clean-label" bacon products. Clean-label bacon products have increased 25.3 percent in that same time period, according to Nielsen Product Insider.

The meat industry, however, has been slow to adjust to consumer demands. Nitrite-free bacon accounts for 20 percent of all bacon items. Clean-label bacon products, which has seen twice as much growth in the past year, makes up only 9 percent of bacon products on the market, according to Nielsen Product Insider.

While some meat processors may be hesitant to change their habits, it's important to consider the demands of their paying customers.

Forty percent of consumers said they would switch their brand of preference in favor of more ingredient transparency, according to a 2016 Label Insight Study. Also in that study, 73 percent of consumers said they would be willing to pay more for a brand with complete transparency.

Consumers increasingly want a nitrite-free product marketed with a clean, honest label. Prosur T-10 can help companies create that product.

As awareness about nitrites and inaccurate labeling spreads, consumers will demand a shift in the bacon industry in favor of truthful labeling.

It's time to think about the transparency of uncured labeling.