

# What Good Is Whole Foods If Its Food Is Poisoned?



By Alex Berezow, PhD — January 25, 2017



Credit: Quickmeme

Whole Foods lies to you. The company's entire business model -- which is predicated upon the idea that organic, non-GMO food is somehow healthier and tastier than regular food -- is a gigantic "alternative fact." And it's a profitable one at that, since organic food commands a high premium over conventional food.

That's what makes the latest news about Whole Foods so infuriating. [Food Safety News](#) [1] reports that the company has shut down all three of its regional kitchens because the FDA "discovered a long list of 'serious violations,'" some of which resulted in surfaces being contaminated with *Listeria*.

Of all the different causes of [food poisoning](#) [2], the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* is particularly nasty. According to the [CDC](#) [3], about 48 million cases of food poisoning occur annually in the United States, about 3,000 of which are fatal. That represents a case-fatality rate of 0.006%. Food poisoning caused by *Listeria*, on the other hand, is far deadlier. Even though only about 1,600 cases occur each year (largely [targeting](#) [4] the elderly, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised), roughly [260 people die](#) [5] from it, giving a case-fatality rate of more than 16%.

*Listeria* is a dangerous microbe, and its presence in Whole Foods kitchens is very bad.

But food safety mistakes happen, even to the best of companies. So Whole Foods' transgression would be forgivable if it weren't for the fact that their "holier-than-thou" attitude toward healthy eating is built upon a foundation of deceit. In a 2014 [article](#) [6] for RealClearScience, I detailed how Whole Foods exploits the general public's ignorance of science and food production by promoting misleading information on pesticides, "chemicals," and the nature of organic agriculture.

Thus, when it comes to food safety, the company focuses on things that don't matter while

apparently ignoring the things that do.

This story is reminiscent of the food poisoning scandal at Chipotle. A couple years ago, Chipotle made a big marketing push over its decision to go GMO-free. Shortly thereafter, it began [poisoning its customers](#) [7] with *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and Norovirus, forgetting that real food safety is about rejecting microorganisms, not biotechnology.

The universe delivered swift justice to Chipotle. In August 2015, its stock price was about \$750 per share. Today, it is just under \$420 per share, a decline of 44%. Likewise, if science doesn't change Whole Foods' business practices, perhaps the markets will.

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**Links**

[1] <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2017/01/whole-foods-closes-kitchens-under-shadow-of-fda-findings/#.WlISYrYrKCQ>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/11/03/stomach-flu-isnt-real-norovirus-and-food-poisoning-are-10403>

[3] <https://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/estimates-overview.html>

[4] <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6222a4.htm>

[5] <https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/>

[6] [http://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2014/06/the\\_lies\\_that\\_whole\\_foods\\_tells\\_108701.html](http://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2014/06/the_lies_that_whole_foods_tells_108701.html)

[7] <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2016/02/cdc-declares-chipotle-e-coli-outbreaks-over-cause-unknown/#.WlI2iLYrKb8>