Hippie Porridge: How Organic Foodies Killed the Magical Quinoa

By Alex Berezow, PhD — March 26, 2018

As every educated foodie knows, one of the world's best superfoods is quinoa. The only problem is that there's no such thing as a superfood, and there's nothing particularly unique about quinoa.

"Superfoods" are supposedly extremely healthy foods, and everyone from Dr. Oz to "Crazy Joe" Mercola has written articles about which ones you should be eating. That's a gigantic red flag. If snake oil salesmen are trying to make money by telling you which vegetables are especially magical, then the odds are that they are pushing hype rather than science.

Take blueberries, for example, which are considered by many to be a "superfood." Without a doubt, blueberries are healthy, since they contain vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants like anthocyanins. But so does red cabbage. However, few people seem to get excited about cabbage in the way they get excited about blueberries. Maybe it's because cabbage makes your farts smell really bad.

In a nutshell, that sums up the entire problem with the "superfood" label. It's based mostly on emotion rather than science. Most fruits and vegetables are very healthy, and it's silly to cherry-pick (no pun intended) specific ones as uniquely magical.

Quinoa: The Superfood Du Jour
For several years, quinoa -- what ACSH President Hank Campbell calls "hippie porridge" -- has been the superfood of the world's super elite. Grown as a staple food in South America, quinoa became so faddish worldwide that prices skyrocketed. For a while, impoverished locals in countries like Bolivia and Peru couldn't afford to buy it [6].

Like all grains, quinoa is healthy. But once again, there is nothing uniquely healthy about it. Compared to an equivalent amount of brown rice [7], 100 grams of quinoa [8] has more nutrients such as calcium (17 mg vs. 3 mg), potassium (172 mg vs. 86 mg), and protein (4.40 grams vs. 2.74 grams). But compared to quinoa, there is far more calcium in milk [9] (113 mg), potassium in bananas [10] (358 mg), and protein in White Castle hamburgers [11] (13.33 grams).

The point is that as long as you eat a balanced diet, regardless if it consists of "superfoods" or not, you will receive all of the nutrients your body needs to be healthy. A glass of milk and a bowl of brown rice aren't as exotic as quinoa, but together, they are nutritionally richer and possibly cheaper.

**How Organic Foodies Killed the Magical Quinoa**

As it so happens, foodies may be turning against quinoa. No, it's not because they feel guilty for having made poor people in South America suffer. Instead, it's because of "processing." According to an article [12] in AFP:

"[T]he soil composition and the processing the super foods undergo to be sold commercially and exported can alter or destroy their unique properties, warned Marcela Zamorano, a chemist specialising in food analysis at the University of Santiago, Chile."

Oh no! The food that was conferred with magical properties by snobby Westerners is no longer considered magical because of the evils of food processing. The irony is a thing of beauty.

Foodies better start searching for a new superfood pronto. Of course, they could just eat a bowl of Cheerios [13], which is far healthier and tastier than quinoa, anyway.

*Note: There is an awful lot of unscientific garbage in the AFP article. It is only being linked for the story about the processing of quinoa.*