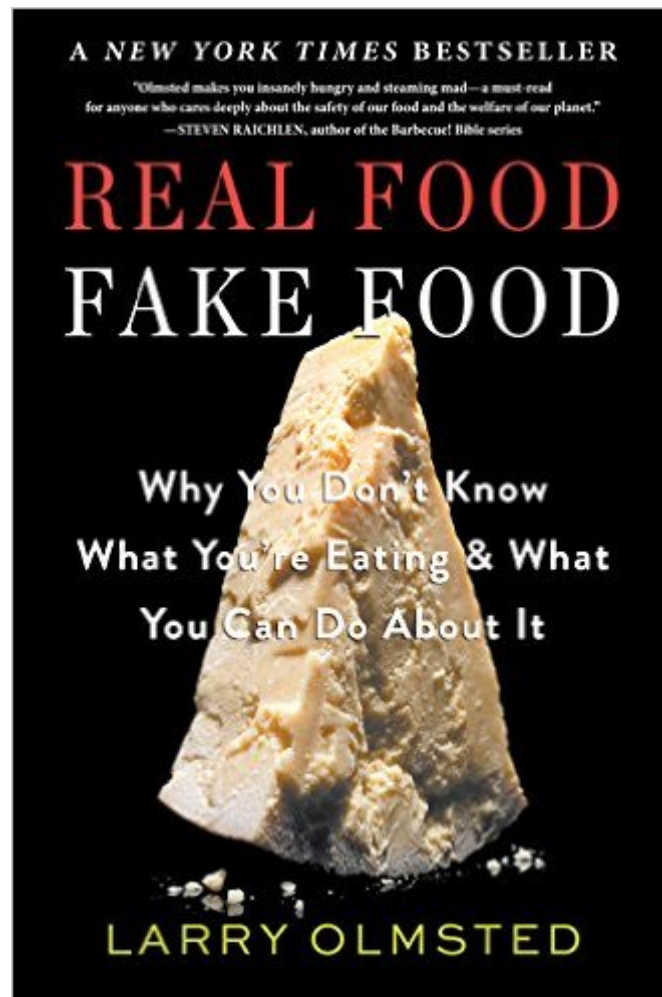


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Real Food/Fake Food: Why You Don't Know What You're Eating And What You Can Do About It



Synopsis

“Olmsted makes you insanely hungry and steaming mad--a must-read for anyone who cares deeply about the safety of our food and the welfare of our planet.” —Steven Raichlen, author of the *Barbecue! Bible* series “The world is full of delicious, lovingly crafted foods that embody the terrain, weather, and culture of their origins. Unfortunately, it’s also full of brazen impostors. In this entertaining and important book, Olmsted helps us fall in love with the real stuff and steer clear of the fraudsters.” —Kirk Kardashian, author of *Milk Money: Cash, Cows, and the Death of the American Dairy Farm* You’ve seen the headlines: Parmesan cheese made from wood pulp. Lobster rolls containing no lobster at all. Extra-virgin olive oil that isn’t. So many fake foods are in our supermarkets, our restaurants, and our kitchen cabinets that it’s hard to know what we’re eating anymore. In *Real Food / Fake Food*, award-winning journalist Larry Olmsted convinces us why real food matters and empowers consumers to make smarter choices. Olmsted brings readers into the unregulated food industry, revealing the shocking deception that extends from high-end foods like olive oil, wine, and Kobe beef to everyday staples such as coffee, honey, juice, and cheese. It’s a massive bait and switch in which counterfeiting is rampant and in which the consumer ultimately pays the price. But Olmsted does more than show us what foods to avoid. A bona fide gourmand, he travels to the sources of the real stuff to help us recognize what to look for, eat, and savor: genuine Parmigiano-Reggiano from Italy, fresh-caught grouper from Florida, authentic port from Portugal. Real foods that are grown, raised, produced, and prepared with care by masters of their craft. Part cautionary tale, part culinary crusade, *Real Food / Fake Food* is addictively readable, mouthwateringly enjoyable, and utterly relevant.

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Customer Reviews

Our household is very careful about the food we buy, which is why I was quite interested in this book by Mr. Olmstead. I was fortunate to hear the interview of him on the Diane Rehm show as well. However, I found this book to be rather frustrating, though it does contain a wealth of interesting and, at times, compelling information. We tend to buy organic whenever possible, and constantly struggle with the budget challenges that presents. So I was hopeful this book would not only provide a sort of guide map for selecting high quality foods, but would also either reassure me that the organic brand is worth while, or dissuade me from spending the extra cash on organic labeled products. Regarding the organic brand, it is never directly addressed. There are many comments that cast significant doubt on the organic label, and others that suggest you look for the label. Certainly, it depends on the food under consideration. In some cases, such as seafood, there is no organic standard. However, in others Mr. Olmstead presents the picture of a defined standard that is not enforced. I'm left pretty much where I started - choose organic when possible, even if it isn't 100% accurate. Further, it always pays to have some idea of the 'provenance' of the product - country of origin, farm, etc... even if that can be faked. I was also a little surprised to see two entire chapters devoted to meat, an entire chapter on Champagne and Scotch, an entire chapter on wines. As a book on 'food', it is really a book about seafood, olive oils, kobe beef, wine and spirits, and cheese. Not much else. I think this book speaks more to the food preferences of Mr. Olmstead than a more comprehensive treatment of the thousands of food products you'll find in a typical grocery store. What he left out could fill volumes. His often long ramblings about regional culture, specific farms and villages, his travels and his food experiences tended to obscure what I was looking for based on the title of the book. A better title might have been: "Larry's World of Food" or something like that. Bottom line - excellent information, but for a limited set of foods and beverages.

In REAL FOOD/FAKE FOOD, Mr. Olmsted documents, in detail, the rampant problems with fake and counterfeit foods sold in the U.S. He covers quite a few different food items, including beef, seafood, cheese, alcoholic drinks--even fruit juice. The frauds are especially concentrated in "special foods which for the first time in 2014 topped one hundred billion dollars in the United States. This category is rife with scams, including many foods viewed as healthier choices, as well as fancy cheeses, meats, oils, and other 'gourmet' items." Prior to reading this book, I admit that I had NO IDEA of how widespread the problem is. Okay, I get it now--it's a HUGE problem. It's

also a little scary: "Unless you are leaving the supermarket via the '8 Items or Less' express lane, something in your cart is likely fake." In fact, the president himself got involved: "In mid-2014 President Obama announced that he was going to clean it up and appointed a seafood task force. When was the last time a national food crisis got so out of control that the president had to step in?" As another example, the widely-cited Consumer Reports confirmed the problem with seafood: "When Consumer Reports tested twenty-three supposedly wild-caught salmon fillets bought nationwide in 2005, only ten were in fact wild." So, the folks there showed that seafood was wrong over half of the time. The author uses a variety of examples to illustrate the problem. For example, he spends a lot of time documenting how "Parmesan" Cheese sold in the U.S. is so much different than the actual, original product. And yet, the U.S. product is allowed to use the name, which is very misleading. The author cites numerous statistics showing how the seafood industry, in particular, is filled with fake products. He notes that if you go to a restaurant and order sushi, it is near 100% certainty that your meal will NOT be what you think it is. He also cites numerous studies which confirm the deception--especially rampant in restaurants. Even fruit juice has problems. Mr. Olmsted notes how labeling can mislead the consumer about what is really in the product. I thought the legal case involving 0.3% "Pomegranate juice" especially interesting. In that case, a major soda brand wanted to sell the juice as "Pomengranate Juice," in spite of the nearly non-existent pomengranate juice actually in the bottle. Whilst reading REAL FOOD/FAKE FOOD, I kept on thinking, "How did this happen? Why doesn't the government stop this?" Well, it turns out that the author is equally mad; he has harsh words for the FDA, who were uncooperative in assisting him. He notes how he made numerous efforts to try to get the FDA to pay attention--but they refused to even grant him an interview, despite their promises. "No amount of follow-up could make those promises come true or make interviews actually happen. I offered to fly to Washington at my own expense and come to their offices to meet them." (They finally let the author submit some questions for consideration.) Readers will likely get a little "steamed" when they realize how little protection the FDA is providing. "Federal regulations require (as in mandatory, not optional) the FDA to inspect less than 2 percent of imported seafood, hardly a rigorous analysis. Still, in 2013, inspectors managed to achieve barely a quarter of that incredibly low threshold and their poor performance has been getting shoddier annually, down from the year before." Take heart--the book is not all whining and hand wringing. Not at all. In the section, "What Can You Do?" Mr. Olmsted provides some practical solutions--ideas on where to buy the real thing, as well as ideas on how to cook. For example, he notes that the "big box" retailers do a good job at removing fake products--simply because they

have so much clout. Similarly, certain grocery chains also are vigilant in not allowing fake products. Of course, the author admits, the real product will be more expensive. He personally has decided to have the REAL thing, but just have it less frequently. All in all, I thought REAL FOOD/FAKE FOOD was an excellent book. I learned a TON about this problem. Honestly, I was totally ignorant of this issue before. At least I am now better informed. I'm also a little mad.

Living in and eating food from the Hudson Valley, NY, we are lucky to know the source of much of our food. Larry Olmsted's book further emphasizes the importance of this connection. His details of the intricate process of producing Parmigiano-Reggiano is fascinating. Not all of his details are as in depth but his findings are disturbing and some outright frightening. His suggestions are very helpful and some very surprising. Highly recommend a read!

Based on his bio, Larry Olmsted is both a food critic and creative writing professor at Dartmouth, and it shows. The book is written in a way that showcases his love of (real) food using descriptive and beautiful language, while also educating the reader about the atrocities of our food ecosystem. In some chapters, like seafood, I was so fed up reading about all of the deceit and fraud (especially being pregnant and trying to be vigilant about the seafood I consume) that I had to skip to the back of the chapter where Mr. Olmsted proposes the most viable solution to the fraud by empowering the reader to find reputable sellers (spoiler alert, there are very very few). I then went back to fervently reading the chapter and continued feeling cheated, but in hindsight was happy to be enlightened. You will find out that Santa (white tuna) and the Tooth Fairy (red snapper) are a fantasy, but armed with such knowledge, you will have the ability to find alternatives, even if they are diamonds in the rough. Happy reading and let's empower people to lobby for changes to support our collective health.

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