

## **Did You Know There's DNA in Your Food?**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Historically, farmers and ranchers in the US, along with the ag research and extension services of the Land Grant Universities, have done an awesome job of producing food for our country, and really for the world. Unfortunately, we have done an equally poor job of keeping you, the consumers, informed about where your food comes from and why it is the safest food in the world. I think we spent too much time in the 1960's and 70's telling you, "trust us, we know what we are doing." The end result was we have far too many consumers that don't understand the natural world in general, scientific principles and especially food production and processing.

I've seen this disconnection between food consumers and food producers for quite some time, but a recent event really brought it home. Our sister land-grant university to the south, Oklahoma State University, does a monthly survey known as Food Demand Survey. It looks at food demand across the country, how much people are willing to pay for certain food items that they buy regularly as well as some interesting questions on public policy issues about food.

Their January survey had some very interesting, and now widely talked about, survey questions. The survey respondents were opposed to a tax on sugared sodas; only 40% were in favor of that. However, 70% were in favor of having mandatory calorie labels on restaurant menus. They found that 86% of the respondents were in favor of labels on meat that tells what country the meat came from. Interestingly most people aren't aware that we already have that. But the one that hit me "upside the head" was that 80% of respondents wanted labels on food that contain DNA. Really?

Okay folks, it's time for basic science. Last time I checked, all of our food came from plants or animals. Every single cell in that plant or animal contains DNA. It is what our genes are made of. It is the genetic code that makes us what we are. Our food has always had DNA and it will always have DNA. If you want a more detailed explanation, come and visit with me. My graduate work was in genetics - I can talk about DNA for hours!

In case you are thinking that people thought that the survey was asking about GMO, well I don't think so because they had a separate question on GMO (genetic engineering) labeling. Respondents were 82% in favor of mandatory labeling of food items containing genetic engineering. Which is an entirely different discussion topic which I'll also be happy to visit with you about if you want.

The Foods 101 class starts today. Everything we eat comes from a plant or an animal. It doesn't come from the grocery store. You bought it at the grocery store but it came from a farm or ranch of some kind. If it was a plant, it was grown in the ground, or sometime in a hydroponic water solution. But it was a plant, that contains DNA. If you eat meat, there was an animal involved somewhere. A lot more of your fish and seafood comes from aquaculture "farms" than you may realize. But again, it's going to contain DNA!

In the coming months I will periodically write about some of our common foods and how they are produced simply because there is so much misinformation out there. If you have questions about where your food comes from, ask! Don't go to some off the wall website that is trying to scare the heck out of you. Come to your trusted sources of information at the local Extension Office. The address is 119 East 9<sup>th</sup> Street in Junction City and our phone number is 785-238-4161. Avoid ugly rumors, get your food facts here!