

# Soy lurks in many non-vegetarian foods

By Rachel E. Gross, Slate

Soy, light of my life, temptation of my taste buds. My sin, my soul. You put the bite in my chik'n nuggets, the creaminess in my soy lattes, the chew in my tofu scramble that all but convinces me that I'm eating something that came out of a chicken. You make it possible for me to enjoy burgers, sausage, chorizo, hot dogs, and chili on a near-daily basis. Thanks to you, not once have I felt left out while my friends chowed down on cow flesh. You are the chameleon of foods, the ultimate imitator, the snack of all trades. For vegetarians like me, you are a culinary miracle.

If you aren't vegetarian, lactose-intolerant, or a lover of Asian cuisine, you may not share my appreciation for this humble legume. In fact, you may not think soybeans have much of an impact on your life at all. You would be wrong. It turns out soy isn't just good at making fake meats more meat-like—it's the secret ingredient making all processed food more, well, food-like.

I found this out a few years ago, when I dipped my toes into the underground world of veganism. As I began paying more attention to ingredient labels, I realized something strange: Soy showed up in a baffling array of foods, from hot dogs to salad oil to Oreos (which are, incidentally, vegan). A quick scan of McDonalds' ingredients list revealed soy in more than 200 items—and not just in expected things like French fries and chicken nuggets, but also breakfast sausages, grilled onions, chicken patties, BBQ ranch sauce, sesame buns, liquid margarine, cinnamon melts, hash browns, griddle cakes, chocolate chips, and bagels. (At Taco Bell, it's the same story.) Forget Dunkin', I realized: America runs on soy.

The weird thing is, people aren't the main consumers of soy—not even close. More than 85 percent of soybeans get crushed and milled into animal feed. The result is highly inefficient: Instead of feeding a high-quality protein to humans, we are first feeding it to our livestock, and then eating the protein in their meat. That means in order to produce 1 kilogram of animal protein, we have to feed livestock almost 6 kilograms of soy or other plant protein. In fact, experts estimate that we could feed at least 800 million more people if we just fed them the grain we usually feed livestock.

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