

Food Technologists Can Change the World – for Better or for Worse



Michael Jacobson, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest

Over the past half-century, considerable research has shown that poor diets contribute to several hundred thousand premature deaths annually.

That research has served as the foundation of major “food fights” to improve the public’s health by reducing dietary saturated fat, sodium, and refined sugars and eliminating artificial trans fat.

Though industry has been slow to reformulate processed foods, and government has been even slower to regulate, there has been progress on all fronts. Food technologists have been heavily involved in all of those efforts. While progress should continue on those fronts, a tougher challenge will be to get people eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Michael Jacobson is a co-founder (1971) and executive director (1978) of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit organization that focuses on nutrition and food safety. It publishes [Nutrition Action Healthletter](#), the largest-circulation health newsletter in the world, as well as numerous studies and reports. CSPI is a key player in efforts to prevent diet-related chronic diseases and food-borne illnesses. CSPI both educates consumers and encourages government and corporations to take steps to protect the public's health.

Jacobson and CSPI use education, legislation, and litigation to win important reforms. CSPI led efforts to win passage of laws requiring nutrition information on most food labels and calorie information on chain-restaurant menus, a 1990 law to define "organic foods," and an FDA regulation requiring that trans fat be listed on food labels. CSPI's studies on the nutritional quality of restaurant meals and movie-theater popcorn generated worldwide interest and spurred major chains to add more healthful items to their menus. CSPI also has halted numerous deceptive food labels and ads by filing formal complaints to government agencies, discussing with companies, and filing lawsuits. Jacobson and CSPI have long been concerned about junk-food marketing aimed at kids, the nutritional quality of school meals, and food safety. In 2011, Jacobson created national [Food Day](#), an event analogous to Earth Day, that promotes healthy, delicious diets produced in a humane, sustainable way.

Jacobson is author or co-author of numerous publications, including: *Six Arguments for a Greener Diet* (2006, CSPI); *Restaurant Confidential* (2002, Workman Publishing); *Marketing Madness* (1995, Westview Press); *What Are We Feeding Our Kids?* (1994, Workman); *The Fast-Food Guide* (1986, 1991 Workman); *The Complete Eater's Digest and Nutrition Scoreboard* (1986; Doubleday & Co.); *Salt: The Brand Name Guide to Sodium* (1983, Workman). Jacobson's two groundbreaking reports, "Salt: the Forgotten Killer" and "Liquid Candy: How Soft Drinks are Harming Americans' Health," catalyzed national action on salt and soft drinks. He also led national efforts to get artificial trans fat (from partially hydrogenated oil) out of foods.

Jacobson is the recipient of the Food and Drug Administration's Commissioner's Special Citation and Harvey W. Wiley Medal, the Food Marketing Institute's Esther Peterson Consumer Service Award, the CDC-Foundation's Hero award, and the American Public Health Association's David P. Rall Award for Advocacy in Public Health.

Dr. Jacobson's numerous media appearances include many major television and radio news shows. He has had numerous technical papers and letters published in the *Journal of Molecular Biology*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet*, *American Journal of Public Health*, and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. His popular articles have appeared in *Smithsonian*, *The New York Times*,

The Wall Street Journal, Chicago Tribune, The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun, Christian Science Monitor, and other periodicals.