

If you're feeling smug because you don't consume meat or animal products, you may be discouraged to discover that phthalates are also found in fruits and vegetables (albeit at lower concentrations). This is not a question of a single product being bad, but rather a symptom of an unhealthy food production system.

Which brings us to the mac-n-cheese report, which is not a peer reviewed study. This means that outside scientists haven't been able to weigh in on the study methods, design, or conclusions. While it was conducted by an independent lab, it was done so at the behest of a host of environmental groups—including the National Resources Defense Council, Earth Justice, Center for Science in the Public Interest and others—under the not-exactly-subtle consortium name "Klean Up Kraft". Additionally, the report is heavily redacted: the specific brands they tested aren't referenced, and there are some discrepancies between the report and the summary sheet released to the media. The report, for example, says that they tested 51 samples, while the summary sheet reports that they tested 30. For simplicity's sake, I'm referencing data from the summary sheet.

The summary sheet says that phthalates were detected in nearly every cheese product tested—29 out of 30—and that average phthalate levels were four times higher in the powdered stuff than in hard blocks and other cheeses. It also reports that the most commonly detected phthalates were Bis(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), which is used to make plastic more flexible, and Diethyl phthalate(DEP), which is most commonly used to bind cosmetics and fragrances. All of which suggests that you should give up mac-n-cheese, right?