CONTROVERSIAL FOODS

Are there any foods you avoid or refuse to eat for moral or ethical reasons? It could be a type of food, a specific product or brand, or even products from a particular country.

If the answer is yes, write down up to 3 of the foods you avoid and why:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD</th>
<th>REASON</th>
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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Each of the foods below is controversial for some reason (or for more than one reason!). Read the list and for each one, decide what you think is most likely to be the real controversy.

When you’re done, read the article and see if you were right.

1. CHOCOLATE
   A. By weight, chocolate has a higher carbon footprint than petrol.
   B. Growing chocolate is a major cause of tropical deforestation (= cutting down old forests).
   C. Chocolate is a major cause of several types of cancer.

2. OCTOPUS
   A. Octopus are among the world’s most intelligent animals.
   B. Many species of octopus that are eaten as food are critically endangered.
   C. Octopus fishing causes severe environmental damage.

3. CASHEW NUTS
   A. The cashew trade is primarily controlled by criminal organisations.
   B. The chemicals used in Asian cashew farms get into rivers, making the water poisonous.
   C. Processing cashews causes injuries and severe health problems.

4. BAGGED SALAD
   A. 80% of salad processing is done under conditions that are dangerous to human health.
   B. Bagged salad leads to food waste and plastic pollution.
   C. Bagged salad often carries diseases like E. coli due to poor factory hygiene.

5. HAPPY MEAL
   A. Fast food is intensively marketed at children despite being unhealthy.
   B. McDonald’s uses beef from the Amazon, where rainforest was cut down for cattle farming.
   C. McDonald’s has paid no tax in the past 10 years (in the EU).

6. EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
   A. The label “extra-virgin” is meaningless marketing.
   B. Most “extra-virgin olive oil” is fake.
   C. The olive-oil trade is controlled by the Mafia.

7. SHARK-FIN SOUP
   A. The practice of catching sharks for their fins and dumping the rest is unsustainable*.
   B. Sharks are highly intelligent creatures that can solve puzzles and that feel emotions.
   C. Most shark-fin soup is made from fake ingredients, often high in dangerous chemicals.

*unsustainable – something that uses natural resources so fast that it destroys the ecological balance
LISTENING

Now listen to two friends discussing three foods from the article. What are they talking about?

One: ____________________________________________

Two: ______________________________________________

Three: ____________________________________________

HIDDEN WORD PUZZLE

Find words in the article to match the definitions below and learn the word for (refusing to buy or use a particular product, brand or service). Write down which part of the article contains each word (one word in each part).

1  Worth a lot of money; found in _________________
2  Work; found in _________________
3  Cannot be processed into new materials; found in ____________
4  In the nearby area; found in _________________
5  Identify something seen before; found in _________________
6  Hit repeatedly; found in _________________
7  A strong feeling; found in _________________

The word for refusing to buy or use a particular product, brand or service is __________________________

QUIZ

Take our online quiz on some other controversial foods. Each of the foods in the quiz is controversial in similar ways to those in the article. Read about each one and match it to the appropriate controversy based on the text.

To access the quiz, scan the QR code or go to http://tinyurl.com/ControversialFoodsQuizAnon

When you’ve finished, write your score here: __________

What surprised you about the foods and controversies in the quiz? ____________________________________________

REASONS TO BE ANGRY

The examples we’ve looked at so far today have been connected to 7 different controversies. There are other reasons for boycotts, though. Here are 5 more food-related boycotts. Fill in the missing information about each boycott based on your own knowledge or using Google to do research. Then, see if you can think of (or find) at least 2 more real-life boycotts and add them to the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boycott</th>
<th>Year / period</th>
<th>What it is (or was) and why</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuna</td>
<td>1986 to mid-'90s</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Coca-Cola Company</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nestle products</td>
<td>1977–present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French food (in US)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish products</td>
<td>2005–7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</table>
PROBLEMS ON YOUR PLATE

SEVEN CONTROVERSIAL FOODS

Each of these foods is controversial. This isn’t the “list of foods to avoid”, though. Rather, it’s an invitation to think more about what we eat. That’s why each one highlights a different problematic aspect of our relationship to food.

Paul Farrington-Douglas (UK)

CHOCOLATE

KEY ISSUES: tropical deforestation, child labour, poverty

No, not chocolate! But yes. Most cocoa comes from small farmers in Ivory Coast and Ghana. They are paid very little, so they rely on labour from entire families, including children. Even “fair trade” certified chocolate is only slightly better, with one report saying fair-trade-certified cocoa farmers in Ghana make only $36 a year more than others. On top of this is the issue of tropical rainforest loss: more than 90% of West Africa’s original forests are gone, with demand for cocoa being one of the main reasons.

• What is a bigger issue for you: ecological damage or human suffering?
• Would you avoid products or companies you know are causing harm?

OCTOPUS

KEY ISSUES: eating intelligent species

Surprisingly, eating octopus may not be too bad from an environmental perspective: they are short-lived animals and we normally eat adults who have already reproduced. On the other hand, they are highly intelligent – possibly among the most intelligent animals on earth. Many people feel uncomfortable with the idea of eating animals with higher intelligence and emotion, such as dolphins and great apes, but don’t worry too much about the very alien-seeming octopus.

• Does the idea of eating an “intelligent” species bother you?
• Are there any animals you’d refuse to eat on moral grounds?
**CASHEW NUTS**  
**KEY ISSUES:** poverty, human cruelty

Cashews are popular in both Europe and America. They’re delicious and healthy, being high in minerals, fibre, protein and healthy fat. So of course there’s a catch (= problem). Cashews are incredibly hard to prepare. They come in a shell containing chemicals that cause severe burns. Before they can be sold, the shell needs to be removed and the nuts cleaned. Most cashews we eat are processed by hand in India or Vietnam. In India, the work is mostly done by women paid 160 rupees (about 2 euros) for a 10-hour day. Many have permanent chemical burns on their hands. In Vietnam it can be even worse, as cashews are sometimes processed by drug addicts in forced labour camps, who are beaten and subjected to electric shocks.

- **Do we, as shoppers, share any blame for human-rights abuses in food production?**
- **Do you connect any other foods with human cruelty?**

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**HAPPY MEAL**  
**KEY ISSUES:** child health

McDonald’s food is not very nutritious, environmentally friendly or animal-friendly, but nor is it especially awful compared to many other fast-food choices. What sets McDonald’s apart is the aggressive marketing of its relatively unhealthy food to young children, especially with the use of unrecyclable plastic toys (the company is the world’s largest toy distributor). The company has made healthier changes to its Happy Meals, but only in countries where there is political discussion of changes to the law. In the US and UK, for example, the only drinks offered with kids’ Happy Meals are water, fruit juice or milk, with fruit as a dessert. In the Czech Republic, the drinks still include sugary, caffeineated sodas, and the desserts include fattening, sugary milkshakes.

- **Should food producers have a responsibility to sell healthier food?**
- **When is advertising to children acceptable or unacceptable?**

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**EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**  
**KEY ISSUES:** fake food, crime

Extra-virgin olive oil is very expensive to make, but most of us don’t know how to recognise it, so it’s very easy to fake. It’s supposed to be the purest, freshest oil, but about 80% of it is not. Most commonly, the “extra virgin” oil is virgin olive oil mixed with older, less pure oil to increase the amount of it and lower the cost. In the worst case, it is mixed with cheap soybean or sunflower oil or with low-quality olive oil that has been treated with chemicals. In 2019, a criminal gang was found with 150,000 litres of “extra-virgin olive oil” for restaurants that was actually sunflower oil, food colourings and soya. The gang of 20 people had been making €8 million every year.

- **If people can’t tell the difference between real and fake, does it matter?**

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**SHARK FIN SOUP**  
**KEY ISSUES:** sustainability, animal cruelty

Shark fin soup is a highly valued dish in China. Historically, shark fins were very difficult to obtain, and the soup made from them was a festival food for the emperor’s court. Modern fishing technology has made it much more available. The shark fins can be cut off as part of processing the whole fish, which can be sustainable. However, because the fins are so much more valuable than the rest of the shark, many fishermen cut off the fin and throw the rest of the shark into the sea. This practice is called “shark finning”. Demand for fins is slowly declining, but 35–80 million sharks are still “finned” every year.

- **Do you worry about species loss?**
- **Is animal suffering high on your list of concerns?**

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**BAGGED SALAD**  
**KEY ISSUES:** food waste, plastic pollution

Bagged salad is only one of many, many products that are part of our pollution and food-wasting crisis, but it’s a perfect example. The salad itself is not usually grown locally or in season, so it adds to energy and water use. It then needs to be shipped and processed, creating more pollution. It uses a lot of plastic packaging that is rarely recycled. And finally, it’s the most-wasted food item of all: in the UK, about 40% of bagged salad is thrown out because it goes bad before it gets used.

- **Do you think we should reduce food packaging, and how?**
- **Do you try not to waste food, and how?**