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## Are your vegetables green enough?

*By David Suzuki with Faisal Moola*

*Give me spots on my apples, but leave me the birds and the bees, please! ~ Joni Mitchell*

Any parent knows that it can be a challenge to get kids to eat vegetables and some fruits. We've learned all the tricks: smothering broccoli with cheese sauce, putting peanut butter and raisins on celery sticks and calling it "ants on a log", convincing kids that eating spinach will give them Popeye muscles.

Some kids just don't like the taste of certain fruits and veggies, and some have issues with the way the food looks. Adults are usually less picky about taste but can be finicky when it comes to the appearance of our fruits and veggies. We've become accustomed to blemish-free produce. But what's wrong with a few spots on our apples?

Well, according to the executives at two of the world's largest agricultural companies, Monsanto and Dole, our kids may be right: there is something wrong with spots, as well as the shape, texture, and taste of some vegetables. Or, at least, that's what they'd like you to think.

The two companies have come up with a five-year plan to produce new varieties of spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, and lettuce with improved nutrition, flavour, colour, texture, and aroma.

We've never really had a problem with the way these vegetables looked or felt or tasted. But then, we now live in a world where square, seedless watermelons are seen as desirable, and where companies like Monsanto can hold patents on genetically engineered seeds to grow food that has a uniform quality. The patents have allowed the biotech giant to sue farmers for "patent infringement" if the plants are found growing on their farms without a licence — even if the plants may have arrived by wind rather than plan.

Monsanto was also one of the first companies to start commercially marketing DDT, and has also been a major producer of Agent Orange, Roundup, and other toxic chemical pesticides, as well as bovine growth hormone to increase milk production in cows.

Dole has been involved in some controversies over its pesticide use, among other things, as well.

The issue isn't just about the agri-giants and pesticides and genetically modified foods, though. (In fact, the two companies say their collaborative project will be done through breeding and not genetic engineering.) The issue is about our relationship with food.

Along with trying to maximize profits, the agriculture industry has made it possible for food to be transported around the world, and for produce to keep longer without spoiling. This can benefit areas that have food shortages or short growing seasons.

It also means, though, that we are giving up a lot of our control over one of the basics of life to large corporations that may not always have our best interests in mind. As Michael Pollan writes in his bestselling book *In Defense of Food*, eating goes beyond biological necessity: "Food is also about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity."

Agribusiness will continue to play a role in our food production and delivery systems, but that doesn't mean we can't embrace some of the other trends emerging in the way we feed ourselves. As Mr. Pollan argues: "What we need now, it seems to me, is to create a broader, more ecological — and more cultural — view of food."

That means eating more locally grown and organic food, eating less meat, steering away from processed foods, and not worrying about the odd spot on your apple. Or, as Mr. Pollan says in the opening of his book: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

These small measures will help make us healthier, and they'll also make the planet healthier, by reducing the emissions generated in food production and transportation and by improving the ways we use our land base. Not only that, but they may even help get your kids to eat more vegetables. Carrots and peas are more fun to eat if your children grow and pick them from the garden.

Come to think of it, we can all find spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, and lettuce with better nutrition, flavour, colour, texture, and aroma than some of the factory-farmed produce found on grocery-store shelves. We just have to look in the farmers markets, or in our own backyard or community gardens.

#### **Web links:**

Monsanto-Dole project

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/>

[no-dessert-mom-just-more-veggies/article1194172/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/no-dessert-mom-just-more-veggies/article1194172/)

Square watermelons:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1390088.stm>

Michael Pollan: In Defense of Food:

<http://www.michaelpollan.com/indefense.php>

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<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2009/07/are-your-vegetables-green-enough/>