

Figuring out mysterious ingredients

The waitress at a restaurant I visit a lot told me farro was safe. Since she has celiac disease, too, I trusted that she knew what she was talking about. So I've been enjoying farro for a while. But I haven't been feeling well and I'm starting to wonder whether she is right. Is farro safe?

Absolutely not! Farro (or faro) is actually the Italian word for "spelt," a kind of wheat. In this case, the problem may go beyond your waitress' apparent lack of knowledge of Italian. Here's some background:

In the past, spelt has been suggested as a wheat substitute for those who are allergic to wheat. Although one spelt producer has disagreed in the past, (see below), it has not been suggested as a safe grain for those who follow a gluten-free diet.

In fact, it is quite the opposite.

Those who follow a gluten-free diet should avoid spelt in the same way they avoid wheat, rye, barley and oats. According to Donald Kasarda, PhD, an expert on grains and their relation to the gluten-free diet, spelt contains a protein structure that is similar to that of wheat. In his view, spelt would not be safe for anyone who has a problem with wheat.

However, in the past some spelt-producing companies have claimed that spelt is safe for those who follow a gluten-free diet as long as they consult with their physician and do not have a "reaction." While this information is incorrect, there are still people who think spelt is safe. Unfortunately your waitress is one of them!

Over the years, we have received calls about spelt from time to time and we have published a few articles explaining that it is not safe for those who follow a gluten-free diet. Still the misunderstanding and the resulting confusion persist.

However, the situation may improve. Recently the Food and Drug Administration said that spelt producers must label spelt products in the same way they would label wheat products. That means they have to include the phrase

"spelt (wheat)" in the ingredients list or add "contains wheat" below the ingredient list or do both. This new requirement should help clear up the confusion over spelt products.

For the record, these grains are related to wheat and are not safe for those who follow a gluten-free diet: Bulgur, dinkel, durum, einkorn, emmer, farina, farro (spelt), graham, kamut, mir, semolina, spelt, triticale (a combination of wheat and rye) and anything with wheat in its name with the exception of buckwheat, which is safe.

Cake flour, couscous, matzo and seitan are made from wheat.

I am new to the gluten-free diet and find it very difficult to understand which strange-sounding ingredients contain gluten. Can you tell me if disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate, tricalcium phosphate or calcium silicate gluten free?

You do not have to worry about disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate, tricalcium phosphate or calcium silicate. The first three are flavor enhancers, while the fourth prevents things like salt from clumping up.

Disodium inosinate and disodium guanylate come from proteins found in fish, seaweed and yeast; ticalcium phosphate and calcium silicate are mineral salts that, strange as it may sound, come from rocks. None of these ingredients are made from wheat, barley or rye.

But the more important part of the answer to your question deals with how to approach the hieroglyphics of a food label. With so many unfamiliar ingredients in processed food it would be nearly impossible to know what each and every one is.

The best way for a newly diagnosed celiac to know if a food is gluten free is to work from a list of ingredients that are safe, unsafe, and questionable. You will find *Gluten-Free Living's* list on our website and on page 33 of this issue.

Those who have been researching celiac disease for a long time have done a lot of the homework for you and know which ingredients immediately mean a

food contains gluten, which require further investigation and which are safe. You may not find every safe ingredient on a list like this, but you can be sure you will find those known to be unsafe or questionable.

Do you know if Kraft does a thorough job of identifying ingredients in their products? Specifically, I am wondering about their Catalina dressing. I think it is the modified food starch that is in question.

Kraft's policy is this: If gluten is in a product, it will be noted on the label. That means they label all sources of gluten, not just wheat.

Kraft made this promise a few years ago, even before the new food labeling law went into effect. And the company continues to label all sources of gluten even though the new labeling law only requires labeling of wheat.

Kraft specifically says the phrases "food starch" and "modified food starch" refer to cornstarch. If a product uses food starch from a gluten-containing source, the source will always be identified on the label. Even beyond Kraft products, in our experience, modified food starch on a label has always turned out to be modified cornstarch.

Now, with the new food labeling law, you can be sure modified wheat starch will be labeled as such. The law does not cover rye and barley, but it appears modified rye starch or modified barley starch does not exist.

That would mean modified food starch, which was probably the most problematic ingredient celiacs were faced with prior to the new labeling law, is no longer a challenge. If the starch is derived from wheat, the label will say "modified wheat starch" in the list of ingredients or "contains wheat" under the list of ingredients. Or both.

Kraft Catalina salad dressing is gluten free. Enjoy! 🍴

*Send your questions to ann@glutenfreeliving.com or *Gluten-Free Living*, 19A Broadway, Hawthorne, NY 10532.*