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— ROBIN COOK, author of *Toxin*



SPOILED

Why Our Food Is Making Us Sick
and What We Can Do about It



N I C O L S F O X



Penguin Books

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SPOILED

Why Our Food Is Making Us Sick and What We Can Do about It

by Nicols Fox

Spoiled apple juice. Contaminated hamburgers. Tainted raspberries. In our age of supposedly unprecedented food safety, why do up to 9,000 people die and another 81 million become ill in the United States from foodborne disease each year? We mistakenly assume that modern technology and science-based federal inspection will protect us from contaminated food -- but we couldn't be more wrong. Journalist Nicols Fox reveals a shocking and terrible truth: *We have upset the ecological balance of the food chain, and we have only begun to pay the price.*

Fox, who has devoted the past several years researching everything there is to know about foodborne illnesses, reveals in her book, **SPOILED: Why Our Food Is Making Us Sick and What We Can Do about It** (Penguin; April 7, 1998; \$14.95), that changes in the way we produce, process, and distribute food, along with changes in our lifestyle and culture, have created niches for dangerous emerging foodborne pathogens. We have become separated from the source of what we eat --and thus have lost control over it. A thriller novel by bestselling author Robin Cook entitled *Toxin*, also to be published in April, builds upon this fear. Cook used the shocking data contained in **SPOILED** as one of his key references.

"Food production," writes Fox, "is a remote and often secretive activity that resembles factory manufacturing more than farming and sets the stage for animal infections that contaminate human food." Gone are the days when what we saw growing in the fields or grazing in the pasture was what ended up on our plates. Because food distribution today depends on an international network of suppliers and processors as well as a complex tangle of transportation

much more frequently than previous generations, trusting their health to low-paid food-preparers who often lack food-safety training. Foodborne disease can begin at home as well when foods that arrive in the kitchen already heavily contaminated are not treated with exacting care.

Changes in our ecology due to urbanization, modern agricultural practices, and industrialization have created new opportunities for the spread of microbes as well. Polluted waters can easily transmit disease by contaminating shellfish; oyster beds are incredibly sensitive to what happens around them. One outbreak from contaminated oysters was traced back to the local fishermen who dumped human waste directly into the sea.

In spite of the microbial threats and frequent outbreaks, Fox indicates that our society has remained remarkably complacent, often blaming illness on "intestinal flu," which doesn't exist (in fact, it is a respiratory disease). Culpability for the lack of progress in taking foodborne illness seriously can be shared by the food industry, the regulators, the politicians, the scientists, and the media. "Each has failed to contend effectively with the problem of emerging foodborne disease because of specific and inherent weaknesses within each system. The situation is made worse by an institutionalized disinclination to work together toward a common goal." Consumer complacency and demand for cheap, ever-available food contribute to the problem as well.

Fox indicates that to prevent further outbreaks, our society must fundamentally change current practices and values. We must assess whether the industrial model is one that is appropriate to apply to food production. The scientific record reveals that animals stressed by crowded conditions, dirty food and water, antibiotic use, and rough handling translate directly into food products with the potential to make us sick. Fox concludes **SPOILED** by stating that the key word to put back into our complex relationship with food is "respect": for the lives of animals, for how foods are grown and harvested, for the conditions of those who harvest and prepare our food, and finally for ourselves and our families and what we put into our bodies.

Kirkus Reviews called **SPOILED**, "a first-rate work of journalism in the public interest." Kirkpatrick Sale, author of *Rebels Against the Future*, said of Fox, "She is our modern Upton Sinclair, and should be heeded." **SPOILED** is a powerful and important book that not only exposes but also explains the emergence of each microbial invader and offers practical suggestions for protecting ourselves and making changes that will remove the fear from each meal we consume.

About the author:

Nicols Fox is a journalist whose work has appeared in *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and many other national and international publications. She has appeared on numerous radio and television programs as an expert on foodborne illness, including *48 Hours*, *Nightline*, and *Today*, and she has been profiled in *People* magazine.

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