



EXTENSION

Change the Trivia Questions – Now There Are "Nine Major Food Allergens"

William McGlynn
Horticultural Processing Specialist

Ravi Jadeja
Food Safety Specialist

Renee' Albers-Nelson
Milling and Baking Program Manager

Darren Scott
Food Technology Program Manager

Since 2004, consumers and food processors have become accustomed to food allergen alerts on foods containing eight major food allergens – milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soybeans. In 2004, the U.S. Congress passed the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act, requiring food manufacturers to declare in the food ingredient statement the presence of the eight major allergens, in any amount, even if used as a processing aid or spice. These eight foods were considered major allergens because they accounted for 90% of all food-related allergic reactions (Food Allergies, 2021).

On April 23, 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education and Research Act (FASTER), which declared sesame as a new, major food allergen (Todd, 2021).

Between 1999 and 2011, the occurrence of food allergies in the U.S. population had increased from 3.4-5.1% (Neilson, 2019). An increasing contributor of food-borne allergic reactions has been sesame, sometimes called benne. In 2019, during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology, data collected from over 50,000 households showed at least 0.2% of children and adults in the U.S. are allergic to sesame. [For point of reference, this is similar to the prevalence rate of soy and pistachio nuts (Presnell, 2019)]. Half of these individuals have required emergency room care due to a sesame seed allergic reaction.

This is supported by research provided by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, showing that 39% of children and 45 % of adults with sesame allergies have severe, anaphylaxis reactions (Poinski, 2021).

On July 17, 2016, 15-year-old Natasha Ednan-Laperouse boarded an airplane in London with her father. Before boarding, she had eaten a sandwich from a local shop. Natasha had a severe sesame seed allergy. Because of this, her family always read food labels and ingredient statements. Nowhere on the sandwich label were sesame seeds listed as being an ingredient. After Natasha boarded the plane, she went into anaphylactic shock. Two epinephrine shots did not save her. After

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her death, Natasha's parents pushed for legislation in the United Kingdom to include sesame as an allergen (Bloom, 2018). In the United Kingdom, Natasha's Law went into effect in October 2021 (Jones, 2020).

Due to cross-reactivity of allergens, people allergic to sesame may also react to poppy seeds, kiwi fruit, hazelnuts and rye grain (Vocks et al., 1993). However, a food product containing these ingredients is not required to list a food allergen declaration.

Sesame seeds are harvested from the sesame plant (*Sesamum indicum*), which is part of the Pedaliaceae family. In 1999, around 400,000 acres were put into production in Oklahoma and Texas for growing mustard plants for sesame seed production. Sesame grows well in dry environments. With the increasing popularity of such products as tahini, which is made from hulled sesame seed, and hummus, which is made from tahini, chickpeas and eggplant, demand for acreage has grown, increasing in Oklahoma, and extending north into parts of Kansas and south into the southeastern U.S. ("Crop Profile for Sesame in United States", 2018). It is unclear at this time if the recent law listing sesame as a major allergen will have a negative impact on production.

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