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## NOT ALL GLUTEN-FREE OAT PRODUCTS ARE EQUAL: PURE VS. SORTED OATS

**T**he issue of oats being allowed on the gluten-free diet has long been a topic of conversation and controversy in the gluten-free community. In the 1990s, oats weren't allowed on the diet because they were grown and processed with wheat and, therefore, could contain gluten. It wasn't until 2008 that growers created the first line of "pure" gluten-free oats following a purity protocol. Now that companies are using sorted oats, consumers are faced with an important decision.

A purity protocol is a series of steps growers must follow if they want their oats to be considered "pure"—safe for those following a strict gluten-free diet. These steps ensure fields stay free of wheat and barley, and year-to-year crop rotation includes only gluten-free grains. Fields are inspected by the company and a third party during planting and prior to harvesting. Harvested seed is processed and packaged using a dedicated and certified gluten-free packaging line. The end product is tested using the R5 Eliza test (an industry standard) and must meet the FDA's standard of containing less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten.

Manufacturing is trying to automate the process by using machines to sort oat seeds by color, size and shape. These machines are expected to remove wheat and barley seeds from oat seeds during processing. But the sorted oats are processed and packaged on shared lines, one of the reasons the sorting process is controversial. The sorted oats aren't grown or harvested in dedicated fields but with wheat-based grains. The sorting process isn't believed to be 100% accurate, because it fails to remove any contaminating dust from the seeds.

Another twist: Gluten-free products containing oats can be labeled gluten free and certified by a third-party organization, but that doesn't mean the oats were grown following a purity protocol. These oat-based products could contain sorted oats, because manufacturers are not obligated to disclose their oat suppliers.

Now that you know the difference between pure and mechanically separated oats, it is important to know which companies are using which type. Bakery On Main, Freedom Foods, GF Harvest, Glutenfreeda, Gluten-Free Prairie, Nairn's and Trader Joe's use pure, gluten-free oats to ensure their products are safe from seed to shelf.

Bob's Red Mill uses both types of oats, while Cheerios and Quaker Oats have opted to use sorted oats in part because supply can't keep up with demand. These products are processed and packaged on shared lines but meet the under-20 ppm requirement. Still, many people don't consider sorted oats as "gluten free" as pure oats, and some have reported becoming sick after eating them.

In the end, it is up to the consumer to make an informed decision based on the available research. What is your preference—pure or sorted oats?

—Jennifer Harris

## It's 5:00 somewhere: gluten-free beer alternatives

**I**f you're not a beer drinker (see page 20), there is no lack of alternatives in the gluten-free alcoholic beverage marketplace. The hottest area of growth at the moment is the rise of "hard" sodas. While many of the popular alcoholic root beers include barley malt, there are several that pass muster for those on a gluten-free diet. Louisiana's Abita Brewing Company recently released an alcoholic version of its famous root beer. It's the first product in the brewery's line of "Bayou Bootlegger" hard sodas and can be found primarily east of the Mississippi River. The flavor profile delivers aromas of wintergreen, vanilla and sassafras, with hints of clove and anise.

Root Sellers, based in Missouri with distribution concentrated in the Midwest and New England, brews its Row Hard Root Beer without grains. Row Hard is made with pure cane sugar, molasses, spices and botanicals. Root Sellers also produces gluten-free Pedal Hard Ginger Beer; brewed with ginger root, molasses and cane sugar. Combining fruits and vegetables, the brewery's newest gluten-free beverage is Himmel & Erde Carrot Apple Ale.

For a lighter fizz, look for gluten-free "hard" sparkling waters such as those from Truly Spiked & Sparkling and Spiked Seltzer. Boston Beer, the producer of gluten-free Angry Orchard alcoholic ciders, introduced its Truly brand last month. Truly's three flavors—Colima lime, grapefruit and pomelo, and pomegranate—are 100 calories per 12-ounce serving and have 2 grams of carbohydrates. The alcohol in Spiked Seltzer's four varieties, including orange and cranberry, is derived from cold-brewed sugar, resulting in a low-carb, low-calorie drink. Distribution for both brands is rapidly expanding beyond the companies' New England bases into the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states.

The producer of the famed Stolichnaya vodka recently released a completely new gluten-free recipe to meet the needs of gluten-free consumers. Made with 88% corn and 12% buckwheat, Stoli Gluten Free is available nationwide. The vodka is labeled "gluten free" pursuant to the U.S. government's labeling classification, which requires alcoholic beverages to be made with naturally gluten-free ingredients. Gluten-free vodka produced by Tito's is distilled from corn, while France's Ciroc is made with grapes. Both Tito's and Ciroc are among the best-selling vodkas in the U.S.

While obscure, mead is one of the oldest alcoholic drinks in existence. Also known as honey wine, mead is created by fermenting honey with water and, unless grains are added (a variety known as braggot), it is gluten free. Like wine, mead can be dry or sweet, still or sparkling. Mead makers, which number less than 200 in the U.S. (compared to more than 6,000 American wineries), tend to focus on local or regional distribution given their size. Highly rated gluten-free meads include those from B. Nektar in Michigan and Arizona's Superstition. Both accept online orders for shipments to multiple states.

—Michael Savett