

# Burger Wars Not Based on Nutritional Science

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Does the number of ingredients in a food determine its nutritional value? That's the contention of one plant-based burger manufacturer. In an open [letter](#) advertised in newspapers including the New York Times, Lightlife Foods challenged the Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods companies over the number of ingredients in their products.

"People deserve plant-based protein that is developed in a kitchen, not a lab," Lightlife's letter states. They further went on to say this: "Our burger has only 11 ingredients. That's it – not 18 or 20."

A little label sleuthing calls into question the validity of Lightlife's criticisms, though. First, most plant-based burgers, including Lightlife's, are made with concentrated sources of plant protein that no home-based cook can conjure up in the kitchen. That does not make them bad; it just means that none of the burgers has a unique claim on protein source. In fact, the predominant ingredients in all three burgers are remarkably similar (see chart below).

As for the length of the ingredient list, Lightlife achieves its shorter list in part by not adding vitamins and minerals found in the Impossible Burger and natural flavor ingredients like lemon juice and pomegranate extract found in the Beyond Burger. The shorter ingredient list simply indicates their burger is lower in certain nutrients. It's also an argument that can backfire on companies producing plant-based meats, given that a beef burger typically has the shortest ingredient list of all – 100% beef.

Lightlife also stated that "our ingredients are clean, recognizable, and simple to pronounce. There are no fillers, GMOs or additives like synthetically produced 'soy leghemoglobin' for flavor and color\*. These just aren't necessary." Whether or not an ingredient can be recognized or pronounced by consumers is not a sign of safety or healthfulness. Consumers who can't pronounce the "pyridoxine hydrochloride" on the Impossible Burger label are still getting the benefits of that compound – which is vitamin B6. Likewise, this burger offers "mixed tocopherols" which refers to vitamin E, a nutrient with powerful antioxidant effects.

Lightlife's letter also raises concerns about GMOs, despite the scientific consensus on their safety. According to a 2018 [statement](#) from the Society of Toxicology, decades of testing have found that genetically engineered foods are safe. Likewise, the leghemoglobin used in the Impossible Burger has been thoroughly reviewed by the FDA and [deemed safe](#).

Finally, the caloric and macronutrient content of the three plant burgers in question, that is, those

produced by Lightlife, Beyond Meat, and Impossible Foods, is quite similar. For example, per serving they each provide 240-260 calories, derive 18-23% of their total calories from fat and provide 19-20 grams of protein. All three burgers have nutritional value.

Choose whichever you prefer, but hopefully that choice won't be based on the number of, or difficulty of pronouncing the, ingredients they contain.

Beyond Burger

Water, pea protein, canola oil, coconut oil, rice protein, natural flavors

Gardein Ultimate Burger

Water, textured pea protein, textured wheat protein, gluten, wheat starch, palm oil, coconut oil, vital wheat gluten

Hormel Happy Little Plants Burger

Water, soy protein concentrate, soybean oil, isolated soy protein, contains 2% or less methyl cellulose

Impossible Burger

Water, soy protein concentrate, coconut oil, sunflower oil, natural flavors

Lightlife Burger

Water, pea protein, canola oil, coconut oil, natural flavors

Pure Farmland (Smithfield) Burger

Water, soy protein concentrate, coconut oil, isolated soy protein, less than 2% of spice, natural flavorings

Sweet Earth (Nestle) Awesome Burger

Water, textured pea protein, coconut oil, wheat gluten, natural flavors, canola oil

*Source: Company websites*