

Prairie Fare

By Julie Garden-Robinson, Food & Nutrition Specialist, NDSU Extension

Are plastics harming our health?

As the world learns more about microplastics, let’s take a look at the history of plastics and their place in our kitchens.

“Have you been hearing about plastics, especially microplastics, lately?” I asked my husband.

He spends a lot of time reading online, so he is often my gauge for column topics. I wondered what he had been seeing.

“Yes. Plastics are everywhere,” he said when he briefly looked up from his phone. He obviously was not very chatty that evening.

What he said was true. I continued reading for this column. I looked around our house, and plastics certainly are everywhere.

As I explored research articles, I was getting a bit alarmed about “microplastics” and “nanoplastics” in our environment.

Let’s take a step back in time and then consider what we can do to reduce the amount of microplastics in our food and environment.

I enjoy combing through antique stores. The implements from our ancestors’ era were made from natural materials. Decades ago, materials were made of wood, metal, glass and other nonplastic items.

However, I do not think we will ever give up the convenience of plastics.

Plastic has a long history dating back to 1869 when John Wesley Wyatt invented a substitute for ivory from elephants by combining natural cellulose (cotton fiber) with camphor to make a shapeable material. Interestingly, the popularity of billiards prompted the discovery, according to the Science History Institute.

Later, another inventor, Leo Baekeland, created “Bakelite” in 1907 as the first synthetic “plastic” insulator for use in the electrical industry. Plastics then became part of the war effort in the 1940s.

Look around your space. Are you drinking from a plastic water bottle or wearing shoes that are part plastic? You might have a part-plastic cell phone at your side. Perhaps

you drove a vehicle with plastic components. You might have a body or facial scrub with “microbeads” (plastic) in your shower. Plastic is part of tires and even clothing.

Most likely, if you are like me, you might have a plastic bag full of plastic bags in a closet. Everything from milk to laundry detergent is sold in plastic containers. We might bring our lunch in plastic containers or wrap our food in plastic wrap. Toys are often plastic.

As time has progressed, plastics have become pollutants, with plastic chairs showing up at the bottom of the oceans.

Researchers have been studying the potential detrimental effects of us inhaling or consuming microplastics. Microplastics are small particles (less than 5 millimeters) that are released as plastics break down. Nanoplastics are extremely small — about 1/70 the width of a human hair.

Pick up a ruler or examine a strand of hair to visualize how small that is.

Unfortunately, these tiny plastics are in our environment. Many plastics do not break down easily. When found in the ocean, microplastics can be consumed by fish and shellfish and, potentially, later consumed by humans.

According to the Food and Drug Administration, microplastics and nanoplastics have been detected in salt, seafood, bottled water, honey, milk, tea and other foods.

The good news is that the FDA states that “current scientific evidence does not demonstrate the levels of microplastics or nanoplastics detected in foods pose a risk to human health.”

The researchers and regulators acknowledge that we do not have all the scientific information we need. What are some practical tips a savvy consumer can do until more research about microplastics is published and disseminated?

Avoid heating food in plastic containers, especially in take-out containers or plastic wrap. Use glass containers to warm foods in a microwave.

Use stainless steel or glass containers for your water, coffee or other beverages. Cook in stainless steel or cast iron pots and pans and other cookware without plastic-based coating.

Use wood or stainless steel cooking utensils. “Black” cooking and eating utensils have been particularly problematic.

Use glass or bamboo cutting boards instead of plastic.

If you care for a baby, do not heat formula or breastmilk in a plastic bottle.

Eat a simpler diet rich in natural antioxidants. Enjoy more “whole foods” instead of heavily processed foods.

Stay well hydrated with filtered water from your tap. Water can help flush out toxins.

Use reusable bags or paper bags instead of plastic bags.

Look for plastic that is safe for food storage. Items labeled 1, 2, 4 and 5 are usually considered to be the safest. If your city has a recycling program, find out the codes that can be recycled.

Instead of a recipe this week, I am providing a resource for gardening and food preparation. Try growing your own food, helping in a community garden or visiting a farmers market.

See www.ag.ndsu.edu/field-tofork (and go to the Resource section) to learn more about growing vegetables and fruits, which are rich in compounds that help fight health issues.

You can explore recipes for bell peppers, cabbage, carrots, onions and numerous other colorful vegetables. Aim for a variety of colorful produce. Foods naturally high in red, blue or purple colors, such as red cabbage, blueberries, red grapes and many others, have been reported to be particularly protective.

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North Dakota among top 10 U.S. states where DUI fatalities are on the rise

A new study reveals that North Dakota leads the nation with the eighth highest rise in alcohol-impaired fatalities

The research by Personal Injury Lawyers from H&P Law analyzed data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), comparing alcohol-impaired fatality rise and fall percentage across all 50 states from 2022 to 2023. This study highlights where DUI-related deaths are surging and where improvements

have been made.

North Dakota takes the eighth spot with a 6.46% rise in alcohol-impaired fatalities. The Peace Garden State documented 33.67 alcohol-related deaths per 100 total fatalities in 2022, which climbed to 35.85 in 2023 — reflecting a steady uptick in deadly DUI crashes.

Looking at the study, a spokesperson at H&P Law commented:

“The findings from North Dakota are a sobering reminder that alcohol-impaired driving continues to claim lives

and leave lasting scars. Behind every number is a family left grieving, a survivor facing a lifelong recovery, or a community grappling with loss.”

“When DUI fatalities rise instead of fall, it signals more than just a traffic safety issue — it’s a deeper societal challenge. North Dakota must prioritize stronger enforcement, harsher penalties for repeat offenders, and broader education to prevent these entirely avoidable tragedies.”

Meeting Notices and Minutes

Notices

The meeting notice requirements apply to all meetings of the governing body of a public entity, including any committee or subcommittee meetings.

Prior written notice is required for all meetings of a public entity. The notice must include the date, time and location of the meeting and the agenda topics expected to be discussed, along with notice of any executive sessions expected to be held. It is not necessary to have a speakerphone or monitor available in a physical location if a meeting is held solely electronically. Instead, all information necessary to join the meeting must be included in the notice.

Under the general open meetings law, there is no minimum advance notice period for public meetings.

Instead, at the same time the members of the governing body are notified of the meeting, the meeting notice must be:

- Posted at the entity’s main location, and at the location of the meeting (if it is not held at the entity’s main location); and
- Posted on the entity’s official website OR filed at the appropriate central location; and
- The central location is the Secretary of State’s office (state agencies), or the City Auditor (city level entities), or the County Auditor (all other entities); and
- Given to anyone who has re-

quested it.

For emergency or special meetings, the entity also must send a copy of the meeting notice to the official newspaper.

Generally, there is no requirement that a meeting notice be published.

Regular meeting agendas may be altered at the meeting. For special or emergency meetings, however, only the specific topics included in the notice may be discussed.

Minutes

Minutes must include, at a minimum:

- The names of the members attending the meeting;
- The date and time the meeting was called to order and adjourned;
- A list of topics discussed regarding public business;
- A description of each motion made at the meeting and whether the motion was seconded;
- The results of every vote taken at the meeting; and
- The vote of each member on every recorded roll call vote.

This requirement applies to all governing bodies, including committees and subcommittees. Draft minutes are public records and should be made available to anyone who requests them, even if the minutes have not been approved.

Find more detailed information in the Open Meetings Guide

Field days slated to collect spurge-eating insects

Bismarck, ND – Field days have been finalized at one North Dakota sites to collect and redistribute flea beetles that eat leafy spurge.

Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring said persons interested in acquiring the flea beetles to release on their own property can collect them from established populations at the field day site.

“Leafy spurge continues to be one of North Dakota’s most difficult-to-control noxious weeds,” Goehring said. “Using the flea beetles for biological control, as part of an integrated pest management plan, has proven to be an effective tool in combating leafy spurge infestations.”

Field days are scheduled as follows:

- Billings County – 10 a.m. MDT, Tuesday, June 17 – Franks Creek Road north of Fryberg
- Billings County – 10 a.m. MDT, Thursday, June 26 – Franks Creek Road north of Fryberg

To get to the Billings County field days collection site from

Belfield, attendees should take U.S. Highway 85 north from Belfield for 8.5 miles, turn west onto Franks Creek Road and travel an additional 14-15 miles. Signs will denote the turn to the collection site on the right, which is best accessed with a pickup or four-wheel drive vehicle.

Other counties are planning field days but complete details have not yet been finalized.

All attendees are asked to help collect and all beetles collected are distributed evenly.

Attendees should bring a cooler with ice packs to transport the flea beetles and are asked to bring sweep nets if they have them.

More information and specific directions to field day sites are available by contacting the applicable local weed control officer:

For Billings County, contact Katie Dillman at (701) 218-0113

The field days are co-hosted by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the weed boards of the respective counties

