Where's the Beef? It's in the Fries Under The Golden Arches
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"One order of fries and a coke, please." A good safe order for a vegetarian to make as he steps up to the counter at McDonalds, right? Wrong! Those spuds have been animalized - soaked through and through in a special formula that's "90 to 92 percent selective beef fat and 1 to 10 percent cotton seed vegetable oil."

Growing public awareness of sustenance in edibles has brought one of America's leading fast food chains under collective scrutiny. In response to various complaints about food-preparation methods, McDonalds launched extensive taste-testing programs and popularity polls to accommodate the grumbling without diminishing food sales. The result was a switch from animal fat to vegetable oils in the preparation of such items as the apple pie, fish, burgers and even the hash browns - all of this to appease the masses complaining about the use of too-high-in-cholesterol animal fat. Fine! Noble gesture. But what about those french fries?

"The french fries are our most popular product. It would be foolhardy to tamper with the taste," Pat Kahler, President of McDonalds of Hawaii, told Hinduism Today. "Personally, I feel that the jury is not in on the issue (of cholesterol)."

The jury is not in? In an August 28th report, CNN television aired a major U.S. Government study emphasizing the high cholesterol content of "fast food" and its detrimental impact on the public health. Kahler, however, went on to say that in his opinion the different kinds of cholesterol contained in animal fats and vegetable oils are not yet that well understood, and for this reason there may not be any significant benefit in switching from the product they are presently using in the deep-fry preparation of french fries. "If you have a good thing," he says, "why change it?"

Officially, the resolution to not change the present french-fry mix was a "Corporate decision based on customer preference for taste." Cost was not an issue, he claimed. But not everyone agrees. Ramesh Mahajan, owner of Standard Sweets & Snacks with locations in San Francisco and Los Angeles, says that money IS the issue. "Animal fat products are less costly than vegetable oils and can be reused." Mahajan, who caters exclusively to a vegetarian clientel in his store/restaurants, feels that McDonalds should at least post "signs all over" stating the ingredients they use, so as not to deceive the general public.

Non-vegetarians are not concerned that they are consuming a meat product, but they are concerned about things like cholesterol. And vegetarians have other concerns. They may have chosen to not eat meat for ethical, religious or philosophical reasons, not to mention health. Studies show 20 million vegetarians in the US, and the ranks are growing daily.

McDonalds has no immediate plans to make any more adjustments in recipes or cooking ingredients. So, if someone looks at a "Big Mac" and asks you, "Where's the beef?" Tell them it's in the fries.