

Clean Label Project Finds Arsenic, Lead and Pesticide Residues in Independent Test of 77 Breakfast Cereals

Testing shows rice-based cereals carry 12 times more arsenic than the rest of the category, while nearly every product tested contained acrylamide

DENVER, CO, UNITED STATES, August 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Clean Label Project](#), a nonprofit dedicated to transparency in consumer product labeling, today released results from an independent laboratory analysis of 77 breakfast cereals, including national brands, store brands and products marketed as natural, organic or nutritious.

Among the key findings:

- Rice-based cereals contained 12 times more arsenic per serving than the rest of the category tested.
- All but one cereal contained acrylamide, with levels varying as much as 21-fold between products. Cereals made with wheat or oats contained approximately 2.5 times more acrylamide per serving than cereals made with rice or corn.
- Of the 13 cereals containing chocolate, cocoa or cacao, 12 had detectable lead, with average levels more than double those found in cereals without those ingredients.
- Four products accounted for 81% of all glyphosate detected across the category, while additional pesticide residues included chlormequat, methoxyfenozide, acetamiprid and metalaxyl.

The results also included encouraging signs of industry progress. No BPA or BPS was detected in any of the products tested, representing a marked improvement since Clean Label Project last evaluated the cereal category in 2018–2019.



“We tested 77 cereals because parents deserve more than a handful of spot checks; they deserve a clear picture of the whole category,” said Molly Hamilton, Executive Director of Clean Label Project. “What we found is that clean ingredients and contaminant-free products are not always the same thing, and that distinction matters when families are filling breakfast bowls every morning before school.”

The testing also revealed a counterintuitive pattern across the category. Many of the least nutritious cereals in the study, including products containing more added sugar and processed ingredients, tested lower for contaminants overall. This was partly because plant-based ingredients can carry greater exposure to heavy metals from soil and pesticides used in farming.

Clean Label Project cautions that contaminant testing represents only one part of a cereal's overall health profile. A product with low contaminant levels is not necessarily a nutritious choice if it contains high levels of sugar or offers little protein and fiber. Likewise, a cereal with a stronger nutritional profile is not automatically the best choice if it also contains higher levels of heavy metals, pesticide residues or other environmental contaminants.

“The goal should not be to choose between good nutrition and lower contaminant exposure,” Hamilton said. “Families should be able to expect both, and manufacturers have an opportunity to improve products across both measures.”

Drawing on the full data set, Clean Label Project named Arrowhead Mills Puffed Kamut, Lovebird Cinnamon O's, Love Grown Power O's Original and Three Wishes Cinnamon to its 2026 Back-to-School Honor Roll. The four cereals were recognized for combining lower contaminant levels with stronger nutritional and ingredient profiles.

The Honor Roll evaluation considered contaminant results alongside ingredient quality and nutritional value, including sugar, protein, fiber and the presence or absence of seed oils, artificial colors, artificial flavors, artificial sweeteners and synthetic preservatives.

Full testing results and the Clean Label Project 2026 [Back-to-School Report Card](#) are available at cleanlabelproject.org.

About Clean Label Project

Clean Label Project is a nonprofit dedicated to promoting transparency in consumer product labeling and holding manufacturers accountable through independent testing for environmental and industrial contaminants. Its mission is to uncover hidden risks in everyday products, guided by the principle that reducing contaminants is critical to safeguarding long-term health.

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