

# Bad Bananas Boast Coop Labels by Artist on GMO Labeling Committee

By Alison Rose Levy

California native Jeff Faerber is a Park Slope-based artist whose work runs the gamut from paintings to illustrations to books. Jeff has been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop for over ten years, where he serves on the GMO Shelf Labeling Committee creating graphic art work, posters, layouts, designing brochures and the like.

Faerber stands in firm opposition to GMO foods. He recognizes that many of the people he knows want GMO-containing foods to be labeled. When they aren't labeled, "people don't recognize what they are buying. There are just so many contradictions."

Explaining how he got interested in GMOs, Faerber says, "I have a natural distrust of what people tell you is safe. The more I looked into the work of Jeff Smith, GMO expert and the author of *Seeds of Deception*, the more I saw that we know too little to be using GMOs so widely, and what we know isn't good." Faerber gives credence to the words of Michael Pollan, who writes, "Don't eat anything that has a big advertising budget."

One of Faerber's prime objections to GMOs is that they are bred to be pesticide resistant, which increases the use of herbicides, he says. "It's easier for farmers to use crop dusters, and this has doubled and tripled the use of herbicides, also made by Monsanto. They are double-dipping."

Faerber is concerned about the dead zone in the Gulf, a huge bloom of chemicals which has killed off all life forms that is approximately the size of the state of New Jersey. It's located where the runoff from pesticide-laden agriculture in the Midwest enters the Mississippi, where it flows downstream to empty into the Gulf of Mexico.

"It's hard to feel good about your country when no one can swim in your rivers because they will get sick."

When children's book author Karl Beckstrand asked Faerber to illustrate his fifth picture book, *Bad Bananas - A Story Cookbook for Kids*, Faerber liked the concept immediately. He saw the potential for some lively and fun illustrations of bananas with piercings and spiked hair, and he also saw an opportunity to work in food awareness, by sneaking some surprise details into the

book's illustrations. In fact, he snuck in labels.

"It wasn't inherent in the text itself but I brought in non-organic and organic labels to distinguish the Bad Bananas of the book's title from good ones," Faerber says. He doesn't view this as proselytizing. He regards his special details, as "a wink and a nod to those in the know."

*Bad Bananas* is a hybrid. It's a story, an activity book that parents and children can read and use together, and it also contains recipes using, you guessed it, bananas.

"It didn't start as a cookbook," says Beckstrand, "but my editor thought it would be the perfect activity book—saving families from those 'I'm bored' moments." *Bad Bananas - A Story Cookbook for Kids* dramatizes the short (shelf) life of a renegade bunch—offering great recipes kids can use, even when a banana starts to go "bad."

We all know how bananas go bad in real life, but how do the book's bananas go bad? First, the bananas are characters who evolve from goodness, to badness, and finally to redemption. Is *Bad Bananas* perchance a morality tale too? Or is it just a rollicking romp through badness that any kid can relish? In the book's portrayal, young bananas begin life innocently enough, green, firm, polite, and tight in their community. In Faerber's illustrations, these bananas sport neat red or blue sneakers; they are basically conformists, the book's text admits.

As they turn a warm and friendly yellow, it's time to bring them home. In Faerber's illustration, golden bananas in their prime boast organic and fair trade labels, subtle signs of their health pedigree. But when bananas mature into banana adolescence, certain predictable behaviors flourish. "Soon they start sneaking rides on fruit hats—or taking the fruit bowl out for late night spins," Beckstrand writes. As banana-ine behavior goes

from bad to worse, Jeff Faerber's illustrations follow suit. When they become a "bad influence on other fruit, hanging out in pears on corners," Faerber depicts a banana with a mean look, sideways baseball cap, and unfair trade sticker, flanked by two tough looking pears. All three fruit sport goatees, and glower at a trembling strawberry.

"No longer good for breakfast," a pair of spotted banana pals, replete with skateboards and chain links, are snubbed by an aloof orange.

As Faerber next portrays them, they have sticker tattoos, pierced peels and wild hair. "If they hang out long on countertops they may become a bad influence on other fruit," says Beckstrand, "or start turf wars with rival bunches."

Finally it comes to a point when a lone derelict banana (complete with piercings and heavy metal) declares, "I'll clean up my act when I'm good and ready."

When one pal performs some slippery banana peel action to trip up a senior, his trio of banana cohorts collapse in gleeful laughter and give each other high fives, when the lady reprimands them, "Bad bananas!" By now, in illustrations, the sneakers have been replaced by cowboy boots.

"You can throw them in the cooler, but that just makes them more off color," Beckstrand writes of a rotting banana leering at a tomato who tells him to "chill out!"

But just when they seem least redeemable, Beckstrand turns their stunts into recipes. In one "scary stunt" a banana with spiky hair slips on his skateboard and winds up in a blender as Beckstrand helpfully provides an easy recipe for a Banana Smoothie, which parents and kids can make and enjoy together.

"In the end, the worst bananas get fried or put away for good."

In this charming story, even a bad banana can turn



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Jeff Faerber, proud illustrator of the book *Bad Bananas - A Story Cookbook for Kids*

out good—"even delicious!" *Bad Bananas* contains a handful of easy recipes that kids can make with parental help. Even when bananas have gone bad, they can still be used in banana muffins, cookies, smoothies and pancakes. A recipe for Banana Redemption Bread uses three to four ripe bananas, along with applesauce, eggs, honey, yogurt, nuts and chocolate chips.

"They're not only tasty, they're right-carb, low-sugar recipes," says the book's author.

Jeff Faerber is currently preparing for an art show in Berlin. His work can be seen on his website, [www.jefffaerber.com](http://www.jefffaerber.com), and *Bad Bananas* is available on Amazon.com. ■

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## Sudoku

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Puzzle author: James Vasile. For answers, see page 16.