



A Twin Cities Natural Food Co-ops Publication

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Mix provides information to members and customers about food, nutrition, health, the cooperative movement and the Twin Cities natural food co-op member stores.

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Twin Cities Natural Food Co-ops

Apples to Organisms

Transparency lies at the heart of the GMO debate.

BY KEIKO VEASEY

Linda Halley spends hours behind a desk. It's unnatural for an organic farmer (Halley is farm manager of Gardens of Eagan), but genetically modified organisms (GMOs—a term used interchangeably with genetically engineered, or GE, organisms) keep her buried in paperwork. "It will only get harder to manage," she says. "We have to certify that our crops don't cross with GMOs. We have to isolate our corn, for example, or time our planting so that a neighbor's GE corn won't pollinate our corn tassels. It's the responsibility of the organic farmer—not the GMO farmer—to ensure that the organic crop is protected."

The FDA approved the first genetically modified crop in 1992. GMOs are now present in up to 85 percent of U.S.-grown corn, 91 percent of soybeans, 88 percent of cotton and 95 percent of sugar beets. This translates to 70 percent of all processed foods containing GMOs—and yet, not a single GMO food item is labeled as such in the United States.

According to the FDA, GMO foods are "substantially equivalent" to non-GMO foods, so omitting a GMO label is not considered misleading—by federal standards. "There's an inherent disconnect between the FDA's ruling and GE foods in that GE foods are patented," says Elizabeth Archerd, community relations manager of the Wedge Co-op. "A patent denotes a product that is significantly different from other products. The FDA's ruling is based on look, taste and smell. Our senses may not notice a difference in GE foods, but that doesn't mean they aren't different from the original or hybrid crops."

Trailing Behind

Worldwide, more than 60 countries require GMO labeling, including 15 countries in the European Union, Japan,



Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and China. It was recently announced that Monsanto, a leader in the field of agricultural biotechnology, stopped seeking GMO approval in Europe where the majority of people are opposed.

In the U.S., concerned non-GMO producers can undergo extensive, voluntary certification, for example through Certified Organic labeling or the Non-GMO Project. This enables them to label their products as GMO-free, but the majority of foods are anyone's guess. National organizations such as the Just Label It coalition have cropped up to push for mandatory GMO labeling. The Twin Cities natural food co-ops are members of Just Label It, as well as the state coalition, Minnesota Right to Know, which advocates for the passage of two bills that would require labeling in our state.

Bills H.F. 850 and S.F. 821 were introduced by the Minnesota House and Senate, respectively, last February and were scheduled to be voted on in the 2014 legislative session. If passed, all GE foods in the state of Minnesota will be labeled: "Produced with Genetic Engineering." In June, Connecticut became the first state to pass a labeling bill under the provision that the law will not take effect unless four other states, at

BEHIND THE BILLS: H.F. 850 AND S.F. 821

By Jennette Turner

If passed, the Minnesota bills H.F. 850 and S.F. 821 would require a "Produced with Genetic Engineering" label to appear on all packaged food for retail, all bins containing raw agricultural commodities for retail sale and all bins containing seed for human food.

The bills will not require farmers to switch to different farming methods or food manufacturers to alter their products in any way. They will only require the disclosure of genetically engineered ingredients on packaging.

Call or email your House and Senate representatives to let them know you are in support of GMO labeling. To identify your legislators, visit www.gis.leg.mn/OpenLayers/districts/.

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GE CROPS, YOUR HEALTH AND OUR ENVIRONMENT: CONSIDER THIS

By Jennette Turner

The FDA, USDA, and EPA do not currently require safety testing for GE crops, but numerous animal-feeding studies have led to alarming results, including: cancerous tumors, organ failure, infertility, increased infant mortality, food allergies, immune system dysfunction, obesity, and premature death. Additionally, the introduction of GE crops has led to a significant increase in pesticide use, which is associated with cancer, neurological damage and reproductive issues.

The environment also pays a price for GMOs. Fish, wildlife and game animals all suffer under exposure to pesticides. Not to mention GE crops are considered a factor in the massive decline of all those that buzz, beautify and pollinate such as Monarch butterflies and bees.

least one of which shares a border with Connecticut, pass similar regulations.

Twenty other states are currently considering the passage of labeling bills, but the U.S. Senate remains skeptical. In May, it voted down an amendment to the federal farm bill that would allow individual states to require GMO labeling. "In the short term, it appears that the [agro-technology industry] has circled the wagons," says Mark Kastel, cofounder of The Cornucopia Institute, a Wisconsin-based farm policy research group. "But in the long term, I think the technology will collapse under its own weight. GMOs offer few true economic advantages to farmers and virtually nothing to consumers."

What's the Secret?

GMOs lack hard facts. Proponents and producers contend that they increase crop yields and decrease pesticide use and that labeling GE crops would cost food producers money, discourage future crop research and development, and eliminate opportunities for farmers to benefit from advances in crop breeding. This, in turn, they state, will result in increased food prices and a stigma against GE foods, which, they add, have not yet been proven harmful to human health.

Not yet is not good enough for opponents of GMOs. "We're essentially running an experiment on an uninformed public," says Archerd. "We should have proof of GMOs' safety—based on long-term studies—before releasing them to the public."



Proof of anything regarding pro-GMO claims is difficult to come by. "The agronomic/economic track record of GMOs on farms is mixed," says Kastel. "GE seed is expensive and requires high levels of petrochemical/agrichemical inputs. Research shows that some GMOs actually produce lower yields. There are almost no traits that offer consumer benefits, and the few that are touted have thus far been unproven."

Research aside, the main issue at stake in the labeling debate is transparency. "The idea that a few companies can patent GE versions of basic crops yet keep it a secret when it's contained within their products is

absurd," says Archerd. "That notion should be rejected by all consumers regardless of their feelings about the products themselves."

"Consumers have a right to know what's in their food whether it's the calcium content, the major allergens or the GMO ingredients," adds Liz McMann, Mississippi Market consumer affairs manager. "And if farmers are motivated to plant non-GE crops to avoid labeling, our environment will be all the better for it."

The debate will wage on, and so will the Twin Cities co-ops that will continue to advocate for mandatory labeling and to provide trusted information to their consumers. "We are constantly answering members' questions about GMOs and that's a good thing," says Archerd. "The co-ops were founded by people who wanted to know how their food is grown and how products are produced, and that continues today."

Keiko Veasey is a Minneapolis-based writer and advisor on sustainable living, waste reduction, public policy and community engagement. Her writing has appeared in local print publications and numerous online outlets.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.justlabelit.org>

<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/>

<http://www.nongmoproject.org/>

<http://www.righttoknowmn.org>

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