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GMO Facts

Frequently Asked Questions



What are GMOs?

GMOs (or “genetically modified organisms”) are living organisms whose genetic material has been artificially manipulated in a laboratory through genetic engineering, or GE. This relatively new science creates unstable combinations of plant, animal, bacteria and viral genes that do not occur in nature or through traditional crossbreeding methods.

Virtually all commercial GMOs are engineered to withstand direct application of herbicide and/or to produce an insecticide. Despite biotech industry promises, none of the GMO traits currently on the market offer increased yield, drought tolerance, enhanced nutrition, or any other consumer benefit.

Meanwhile, a growing body of evidence connects GMOs with health problems, environmental damage and violation of farmers’ and consumers’ rights.

Are GMOs safe?

Most developed nations do not consider GMOs to be safe. In more than 60 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan, and all of the countries in the European Union, there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMOs. In the U.S., the government has approved GMOs based on studies conducted by the same corporations that created them and profit

from their sale. Increasingly, Americans are taking matters into their own hands and choosing to opt out of the GMO experiment.

Are GMOs labeled?

Unfortunately, even though polls consistently show that a significant majority of Americans want to know if the food they're purchasing contains GMOs, the powerful biotech lobby has succeeded in keeping this information from the public. In the absence of mandatory labeling, the Non-GMO Project was created to give consumers the informed choice they deserve.

Where does the Non-GMO Project come in?

The Non-GMO Project is a non-profit organization with a mission of protecting the non-GMO food supply and giving consumers an informed choice. We offer North America's ONLY third party verification for products produced according to rigorous best practices for GMO avoidance (for more info, [click here](#)). Our strategy is to empower consumers to make change through the marketplace. If people stop buying GMOs, companies will stop using them and farmers will stop growing them.

Do Americans want non-GMO foods and supplements?

Polls consistently show that a significant majority of North Americans would like to be able to tell if the food they're purchasing contains GMOs (a 2012 Mellman Group poll found that 91% of American consumers wanted GMOs labeled). And, according to a recent CBS/New York Times poll, 53% of consumers said they would not buy food that has been genetically modified. The Non-GMO Project's seal for verified products will, for the first time, give the public an opportunity to make an informed choice when it comes to GMOs.

How common are GMOs?

In the U.S., GMOs are in as much as 80% of conventional processed food. [Click here for a current list of GMO risk crops](#).

Why does the Non-GMO Project verify products that have a low risk of containing GMOs?

Some ingredients that seem low-risk may have less-visible high-risk ingredients. Take, for example, dried fruit. Raisins and similar fruit are sometimes packed with a small quantity of oil to keep them moist. This oil, when used, is sometimes high-GMO-risk. As such, it is critical that we do take the time to look carefully at ingredient spec sheets during the verification process, to ensure that risks like this are effectively mitigated, even in apparently low-risk products.

Contamination incidents have occurred with seemingly "low-risk" products (rice, starling corn, flax). Non-GMO Project Verification supports manufacturers in being able to quickly and proactively respond to unexpected contamination issues.

Verifying only high-risk products puts a heavy burden on consumers to know what products are at risk of containing GMOs. Many people, even in the world of Natural Foods, don't know what a GMO is, let alone which crops and processed ingredients are high-risk. As such, labeling only products that contain high-risk ingredients could give an unfair competitive advantage to products that contain ingredients containing corn, soy, etc. Taking the cereal aisle for our example, if we verified only high-risk products, a shopper might see the seal on a box of verified corn flakes, but not on the wheat-based cereal box next to them, produced with the same high standards by the same company. This could leave them thinking the corn flakes were non-GMO, but that they should avoid the wheat product, even though there's no GMO wheat on the market. Given the lack of understanding of the issue, this presents some serious issues.

Through verifying low-risk products, the Non-GMO Project's work builds consumer interest and industry investment in Non-GMO, even for crops that aren't genetically engineered yet. Biotech is constantly working to patent and commercialize new organisms (salmon, apples, etc.), and the more companies that have committed to Non-GMO production, the more resistance these new developments will see prior to release.

What are the impacts of GMOs on the environment?

Over 80% of all GMOs grown worldwide are engineered for herbicide tolerance. As a result, use of toxic herbicides like Roundup has increased 15 times since GMOs were introduced. GMO crops are also responsible for the emergence of "super weeds" and "super bugs:" which can only be killed with ever more toxic poisons like 2,4-D (a major ingredient in Agent Orange). GMOs are a direct extension of chemical agriculture, and are developed and sold by the world's biggest chemical companies. The long-term impacts of GMOs are unknown, and once released into the environment these novel organisms cannot be recalled.

How do GMOs affect farmers?

Because GMOs are novel life forms, biotechnology companies have been able to obtain patents with which to restrict their use. As a result, the companies that make GMOs now have the power to sue farmers whose fields are contaminated with GMOs, even when it is the result of inevitable drift from neighboring fields. GMOs therefore pose a serious threat to farmer sovereignty and to the national food security of any country where they are grown, including the United States.

How can I avoid GMOs?

Choose food and products that are Non-GMO Project Verified! [Click here to see a complete list.](#)

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