



An anti-Monsanto protest earlier this year. Similar protests were set to hit 48 countries on six continents Saturday. (photo: Reuters)

## USDA Forces Whole Foods to Accept Monsanto

By Why Don't You Try This News, 03 February 16

**I**n the wake of a 12-year battle to keep Monsanto's Genetically Engineered (GE) crops from contaminating the nation's 25,000 organic farms and ranches, America's organic consumers and producers are facing betrayal.

A self-appointed cabal of the Organic Elite, spearheaded by Whole Foods Market, Organic Valley, and Stonyfield Farm, has decided it's time to surrender to Monsanto. Top executives from these companies have publicly admitted that they no longer oppose the mass commercialization of GE crops, such as Monsanto's controversial Roundup Ready alfalfa, and are prepared to sit down and cut a deal for "coexistence" with Monsanto and USDA biotech cheerleader Tom Vilsack.

In a cleverly worded, but profoundly misleading email sent to its customers last week, Whole Foods Market, while proclaiming their support for organics and "seed purity," gave the green light to USDA bureaucrats to approve the "conditional deregulation" of Monsanto's genetically engineered, herbicide-resistant alfalfa.

Beyond the regulatory euphemism of "conditional deregulation," this means that WFM and their colleagues are willing to go along with the massive planting of a chemical and energy-intensive GE perennial crop, alfalfa; guaranteed to spread its mutant genes and seeds across the nation; guaranteed to contaminate the alfalfa fed to organic animals; guaranteed to lead to massive poisoning of farm workers and destruction of the essential soil food web by the toxic herbicide, Roundup; and guaranteed to produce Roundup-resistant superweeds that will require

even more deadly herbicides such as 2,4 D to be sprayed on millions of acres of alfalfa across the U.S.

In exchange for allowing Monsanto's premeditated pollution of the alfalfa gene pool, WFM wants "compensation." In exchange for a new assault on farmworkers and rural communities (a recent large-scale Swedish study found that spraying Roundup doubles farm workers' and rural residents' risk of getting cancer), WFM expects the pro-biotech USDA to begin to regulate rather than cheerlead for Monsanto. In payment for a new broad spectrum attack on the soil's crucial ability to provide nutrition for food crops and to sequester dangerous greenhouse gases (recent studies show that Roundup devastates essential soil microorganisms that provide plant nutrition and sequester climate-destabilizing greenhouse gases), WFM wants the Biotech Bully of St. Louis to agree to pay "compensation" (i.e. hush money) to farmers "for any losses related to the contamination of his crop."

In its email of Jan. 21, 2011 WFM calls for "public oversight by the USDA rather than reliance on the biotechnology industry," even though WFM knows full well that federal regulations on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) do not require pre-market safety testing, nor labeling; and that even federal judges have repeatedly ruled that so-called government "oversight" of Frankencrops such as Monsanto's sugar beets and alfalfa is basically a farce. At the end of its email, WFM admits that its surrender to Monsanto is permanent: "The policy set for GE alfalfa will most likely guide policies for other GE crops as well True coexistence is a must."

## Why Is Organic Inc. Surrendering?

According to informed sources, the CEOs of WFM and Stonyfield are personal friends of former Iowa governor, now USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack, and in fact made financial contributions to Vilsack's previous electoral campaigns. Vilsack was hailed as "Governor of the Year" in 2001 by the Biotechnology Industry Organization, and traveled in a Monsanto corporate jet on the campaign trail. Perhaps even more fundamental to Organic Inc.'s abject surrender is the fact that the organic elite has become more and more isolated from the concerns and passions of organic consumers and locavores. The Organic Inc. CEOs are tired of activist pressure, boycotts, and petitions. Several of them have told me this to my face. They apparently believe that the battle against GMOs has been lost, and that it's time to reach for the consolation prize. The consolation prize they seek is a so-called "coexistence" between the biotech Behemoth and the organic community that will lull the public to sleep and greenwash the unpleasant fact that Monsanto's unlabeled and unregulated genetically engineered crops are now spreading their toxic genes on 1/3 of U.S. (and 1/10 of global) crop land.

WFM and most of the largest organic companies have deliberately separated themselves from anti-GMO efforts and cut off all funding to campaigns working to label or ban GMOs. The so-called Non-GMO Project, funded by Whole Foods and giant wholesaler United Natural Foods (UNFI) is basically a greenwashing effort (although the 100% organic companies involved in this project seem to be operating in good faith) to show that certified organic foods are basically free from GMOs (we already know this since GMOs are banned in organic production), while failing to focus on so-called "natural" foods, which constitute most of WFM and UNFI's sales and are routinely contaminated with GMOs.

From their "business as usual" perspective, successful lawsuits against GMOs filed by public interest groups such as the Center for Food Safety; or noisy attacks on Monsanto by groups like the Organic Consumers Association, create bad publicity, rattle their big customers such as Wal-Mart, Target, Kroger, Costco, Supervalu, Publix and Safeway; and remind consumers that organic crops and foods such as corn, soybeans, and canola are slowly but surely becoming contaminated by Monsanto's GMOs.

**Whole Food's Dirty Little Secret: Most of the So-Called "Natural" Processed Foods and Animal Products They Sell Are Contaminated with GMOs**

The main reason, however, why Whole Foods is pleading for coexistence with Monsanto, Dow, Bayer, Syngenta, BASF and the rest of the biotech bullies, is that they

desperately want the controversy surrounding genetically engineered foods and crops to go away. Why? Because they know, just as we do, that 2/3 of WFM's \$9 billion annual sales is derived from so-called "natural" processed foods and animal products that are contaminated with GMOs. We and our allies have tested their so-called "natural" products (no doubt WFM's lab has too) containing non-organic corn and soy, and guess what: they're all contaminated with GMOs, in contrast to their certified organic products, which are basically free of GMOs, or else contain barely detectable trace amounts.

Approximately 2/3 of the products sold by Whole Foods Market and their main distributor, United Natural Foods (UNFI) are not certified organic, but rather are conventional (chemical-intensive and GMO-tainted) foods and products disguised as "natural."

Unprecedented wholesale and retail control of the organic marketplace by UNFI and Whole Foods, employing a business model of selling twice as much so-called "natural" food as certified organic food, coupled with the takeover of many organic companies by multinational food corporations such as Dean Foods, threatens the growth of the organic movement.

**Covering Up GMO Contamination: Perpetrating "Natural" Fraud**

Many well-meaning consumers are confused about the difference between conventional products marketed as "natural," and those nutritionally/environmentally superior and climate-friendly products that are "certified organic."

Retail stores like WFM and wholesale distributors like UNFI have failed to educate their customers about the qualitative difference between natural and certified organic, conveniently glossing over the fact that nearly all of the processed "natural" foods and products they sell contain GMOs, or else come from a "natural" supply chain where animals are force-fed GMO grains in factory farms or Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

A troubling trend in organics today is the calculated shift on the part of certain large formerly organic brands from certified organic ingredients and products to so-called "natural" ingredients. With the exception of the "grass-fed and grass-finished" meat sector, most "natural" meat, dairy, and eggs are coming from animals reared on GMO grains and drugs, and confined, entirely, or for a good portion of their lives, in CAFOs.

Whole Foods and UNFI are maximizing their profits by selling quasi-natural products at premium organic prices. Organic consumers are increasingly left without certified organic choices while genuine organic farmers and ranchers continue to lose market share to "natural"

imposters. It's no wonder that less than 1% of American farmland is certified organic, while well-intentioned but misled consumers have boosted organic and "natural" purchases to \$80 billion annually-approximately 12% of all grocery store sales.

### **The Solution: Truth-in-Labeling Will Enable Consumers to Drive So-Called "Natural" GMO and CAFO-Tainted Foods Off the Market**

There can be no such thing as "coexistence" with a reckless industry that undermines public health, destroys biodiversity, damages the environment, tortures and poisons animals, destabilizes the climate, and economically devastates the world's 1.5 billion seed-saving small farmers. There is no such thing as coexistence between GMOs and organics in the European Union. Why? Because in the EU there are almost no GMO crops under cultivation, nor GM consumer food products on supermarket shelves. And why is this? Because under EU law, all foods containing GMOs or GMO ingredients must be labeled. Consumers have the freedom to choose or not to choose GMOs; while farmers, food processors, and retailers have (at least legally) the right to lace foods with GMOs, as long as they are safety-tested and labeled. Of course the EU food industry understands that consumers, for the most part, do not want to purchase or consume GE foods. European farmers and food companies, even junk food purveyors like McDonald's and Wal-Mart, understand quite well the concept expressed by a Monsanto executive when GMOs first came on the market: "If you put a label on genetically engineered food you might as well put a skull and crossbones on it."

The biotech industry and Organic Inc. are supremely conscious of the fact that North American consumers, like their European counterparts, are wary and suspicious of GMO foods. Even without a PhD, consumers understand you don't want your food safety or environmental sustainability decisions to be made by out-of-control chemical companies like Monsanto, Dow, or Dupont - the same people who brought you toxic pesticides, Agent Orange, PCBs, and now global warming. Industry leaders are acutely aware of the fact that every single industry or government poll over the last 16 years has shown that 85-95% of American consumers want mandatory labels on GMO foods. Why? So that we can avoid buying them. GMO foods have absolutely no benefits for consumers or the environment, only hazards. This is why Monsanto and their friends in the Bush, Clinton, and Obama administrations have prevented consumer GMO truth-in-

labeling laws from getting a public discussion in Congress.

Although Congressman Dennis Kucinich (Democrat, Ohio) recently introduced a bill in Congress calling for mandatory labeling and safety testing for GMOs, don't hold your breath for Congress to take a stand for truth-in-labeling and consumers' right to know what's in their food. Especially since the 2010 Supreme Court decision in the so-called "Citizens United" case gave big corporations and billionaires the right to spend unlimited amounts of money (and remain anonymous, as they do so) to buy media coverage and elections, our chances of passing federal GMO labeling laws against the wishes of Monsanto and Food Inc. are all but non-existent. Perfectly dramatizing the "Revolving Door" between Monsanto and the Federal Government, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, formerly chief counsel for Monsanto, delivered one of the decisive votes in the Citizens United case, in effect giving Monsanto and other biotech bullies the right to buy the votes it needs in the U.S. Congress.

With big money controlling Congress and the media, we have little choice but to shift our focus and go local. We've got to concentrate our forces where our leverage and power lie, in the marketplace, at the retail level; pressuring retail food stores to voluntarily label their products; while on the legislative front we must organize a broad coalition to pass mandatory GMO (and CAFO) labeling laws, at the city, county, and state levels.

The Organic Consumers Association, joined by our consumer, farmer, environmental, and labor allies, has just launched a nationwide Truth-in-Labeling campaign to stop Monsanto and the Biotech Bullies from force-feeding unlabeled GMOs to animals and humans.

Utilizing scientific data, legal precedent, and consumer power the OCA and our local coalitions will educate and mobilize at the grassroots level to pressure giant supermarket chains (Wal-Mart, Kroger, Costco, Safeway, Supervalu, and Publix) and natural food retailers such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's to voluntarily implement "truth-in-labeling" practices for GMOs and CAFO products; while simultaneously organizing a critical mass to pass mandatory local and state truth-in-labeling ordinances - similar to labeling laws already in effect for country of origin, irradiated food, allergens, and carcinogens.

To pressure Whole Foods Market and the nation's largest supermarket chains to voluntarily adopt truth-in-labeling practices sign here, and circulate these petitions widely. Power to the People! Not the Corporations!