

Thank you for being passionate about genetically engineered (GE or GMO) crops and for expressing your concern about the availability of non-GMO foods. We are very passionate about this too and are extremely upset that our position has been distorted out there.

Don't be fooled by the OCA (Organic Consumers Association) as it often twists the truth which confuses consumers. This time, OCA is misleading you by implying that we have "surrendered" to Monsanto and "cut a deal" for co-existence and that we'll receive "compensation." **Nothing could be further from the truth.** Whole Foods Market, along with the National Cooperative Grocers Association, the National Organic Coalition, the Organic Trade Association, Organic Valley, Stonyfield Farms, United Natural Foods and many others in the organic community, were trying to secure protections for organic farmers so biotechnology companies for the first time would be held accountable if GE crops polluted non-GE crops and would be forced to pay for the damages. (No money would ever go to us!) We were also pushing for measures to protect seed purity so that non-GE alfalfa supplies could be maintained.

Unfortunately, none of those protections were approved as, to our utter disappointment, the USDA decided to completely deregulate GE alfalfa without restrictions. This means farmers will now be able to plant Roundup Ready GE alfalfa beginning as soon as this spring without having to take into consideration its potential to contaminate neighboring organic and other non-GE alfalfa fields intended to be sold in markets demanding non-genetically engineered products. This is a huge loss for organic and non-GE farmers and consumers who want to have access to non-GE foods.

For the OCA to widely spread misinformation and lies about Whole Foods Market and other organic companies by saying that we are joining forces with the biotechnology industry (Monsanto) is beyond ludicrous--especially at a time when we all need to come together to support our goal of ensuring the availability of non-GE foods in the marketplace. To help clarify our overall position, we think it is helpful to see how Megan Westgate, Executive Director of the NON-GMO Project, describes the coalition efforts:

*Leading up to the ruling, a broad coalition of organic organizations and companies were working around the clock in an attempt to influence the USDA's decision. **The USDA had already made it clear that alfalfa would be deregulated, but hope remained that there might be some way to soften the blow.** [Organic Valley](#), [Whole Foods](#) and [Stonyfield Farm](#), along with many others in the organic community, were doing everything in their power to secure protections for organic farmers so that if their fields were contaminated once the GMO alfalfa was released, biotechnology companies for the first time would be held accountable for their pollution and would be forced to pay for the damages. These groups were also pushing for measures to protect seed purity so that non-GMO alfalfa supplies could be maintained. Unfathomably, these tireless organic organizations are now being criticized for their efforts. In total denial of the incontrovertible fact that the USDA was never even remotely considering a full ban on GMO alfalfa, some are suggesting that these group's efforts to make the most of a bad situation \*somehow\* (though no one is very specific on how, exactly) signals corruption, and are even calling for [boycotts](#). HOW ON EARTH is taking this out on 1200 organic family farmers going to help anything?! This is divisiveness we cannot afford.*

You can read the full article here: <http://www.nongmoproject.org/2011/01/29/team-organic-will-never-surrender-to-monsanto-now-we-continue-the-fight-together/>

Additionally, you may have seen strange accusations saying that Whole Foods Market has agreed to sell genetically engineered foods. We haven't agreed to anything! This is another attempt to twist the facts. The reality is that **no grocery store in the United States, no matter what size or type of business, can claim they are GMO-free.** While we have been and will continue to be staunch supporters of non-GMO foods, we are not going to mislead our customers with an inaccurate claim (and you should question anyone who does). Here's why: the pervasive planting of GMO crops in the U.S. and their subsequent use in our national food supply. 93% of soy, 86% of corn, 93% of cotton, and 93% of canola seed planted in the U.S. in 2010 were genetically engineered. Since

these crops are commonly present in a wide variety of foods, a GMO-free store is currently not possible in the U.S. (unless the store sells *only* organic foods.)

Since the U. S. national organic standards do not allow the use of GMO ingredients and practices in the growing or production of organic foods, choosing organic is one way consumers can avoid GMO foods. The other is through labeling, of which we are strong supporters. Here is a look at some of the other things we have done on the non-GE front over the past couple of decades:

- We have advocated for mandatory labeling of GMO foods since 1992, even before they were made commercially available.
- We were founding members of the Non-GMO Project, which works to ensure the sustained availability of non-GMO choices through an industry-wide product standard to create a non-GMO labeling program that can be fully substantiated.
- Our 365 Everyday Value® and Whole Foods Market™ brand products are sourced to avoid GMOS, and [our partnership with the Non-GMO Project](#) will enable us to verify and label both natural and organic products. In fact, we have enrolled our store brand food products in this pioneering product verification program, which ensures the sustained availability of non-GMO choices through an industry-wide product standard. These include products that natural as well as those that are organic.
- Beyond our stores, we have publicly advocated for clear labeling of GE food and shared our concerns that the USDA and FDA's policies on GE foods are not consistent with our consumers' expectations.

We will continue to work aggressively on this issue because we believe that GMO food ingredients should be clearly labeled, and that consumers who want to avoid them should have an actionable way to do so. While the USDA's decision will make our work more difficult, we are as committed as ever to ensuring that non-GMO food remains available and we will continue to advocate for our farmers and for our shoppers on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity for us to present the more complete picture on Whole Foods Market and non-GE products in the food supply.