

GMOs and Organics—An Analytical Perspective

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Keywords: genetic engineering, GMOs, GMO testing, cross-pollination, consumer expectations

Abstract

The intentional use of GMOs—genetically engineered crop varieties—is prohibited in organic agriculture and food production. However, current use of GMOs in conventional agriculture poses significant challenges to the integrity and authenticity of organic because it creates a real risk that organic foods could be unintentionally contaminated with GMOs. Based on experience over the last 12 years working with the organic industry on this issue, this paper discusses consumers' expectation that "organic means no GMOs," in the light of the actual extent of GMO risk in Europe, North America, Japan, China, India, Latin America, Africa, and Australia and New Zealand. We identify the gap between consumers' expectations regarding GMOs and industry practices as the most significant challenge to the organic movement today, and discuss a range of approaches to addressing this challenge. On the micro-level, the level of the individual organic production system, traceability systems, segregation procedures and sourcing strategies, backed up by GMO testing, can be used to control GMO risk. On the macro-level, industry-wide cooperation can successfully address overarching challenges, such as establishing sustainable supplies of non-GM seed and of certain critical ingredients. An example of such an effort, the Non-GMO Project, is described, through which many companies spanning the full range of the North American organic industry are working together to successfully address the GMO challenge.

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