

Organic Vs. Non-GMO: Battle of the Deluded



By Ruth Kava — December 9, 2015



[1] In the American food market, labels have proliferated. We have organic, natural

(whatever that means), gluten-free, lo-fat, and a variety of others whatever marketers think will help distinguish their products from others, and sell more of them at the same time.

Now we have a battle between purveyors of organic foods and those whose foods aren't organic, but contain no genetically engineered (GMO) ingredients. According to a recent [article](#) [2] in the *Wall Street Journal*, the conflict is heating up as foods labelled "non-GMO" are capturing more and more of consumers' dollars which might otherwise accrue to organic foods. Indeed, the WSJ wrote, "Last year, foods labeled non-GMO claimed 3.7% of total food sales in U.S. grocery stores, more than the 3.5% for organic items."

Is there any difference between foods subsumed under each label?

Well yes. Foods that carry the USDA's certification label ("organic") cannot contain any ingredients (1) produced with synthetic pesticides or GMO ingredients, or (2) that have been irradiated, among other requirements. On the other hand, foods with just the non-GMO label do not have to be organic. There is no government oversight required for this label it's just certified by private organizations. They may have been produced with pesticides or been irradiated.

The distinction is important to food companies that have paid big bucks to achieve whatever certification they want to use. Organic food purveyors point out that organic already is non-GMO, but a non-GMO food is not necessarily organic. But for the rest of us, it's basically a tempest in a teapot, since neither type of food has any benefit when it comes to nutrition or health. In spite of that, there is a movement to have the government require labeling of foods that do contain GMOs.

Food companies are not, however, behind this mandatory labeling movement. In fact, they are [aggressively pushing](#) [3] the federal government to prohibit mandatory GMO labels, pointing out (as we have [said](#) [4] for years) that there are no differences between "non-GMO" foods and their counterparts with GMO ingredients with respect to health or nutritional value. If the federal government does move to prohibit states from mandating "Contains GMO" labels, it would take precedence over any movements by states to require GMO-labeling. Thus, the GMO-labeling law currently on the books in Vermont, for example would be overturned.

The take-home message for consumers is to expect to see more advertisements from each side pushing their own misguided story about their foods' putative benefits. But like all advertising, the purpose is to generate consumer interest (and dollars), not to educate.

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/12/09/organic-vs-non-gmo-battle-of-the-deluded>

Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Screen-Shot-2015-12-09-at-12.46.44-PM.png>

[2] <http://www.wsj.com/articles/organic-vs-non-gmo-labels-whos-wicnning-1449619118?source=acsh.org&cb=logged0.5669278854038566>

[3] <http://news.yahoo.com/food-industry-pushing-thwart-gmo-labeling-end-050637927.html>

[4]

<http://cl.exct.net/?ju=fe581d727261017e7316&ls=fe281d7874600379741574&m=fe1172766306&l=fe>