



Labeling genetically modified foods

I'm surprised that genetically modified foods aren't required to be labeled. Why aren't they?

This remains a controversial topic, and there are points to be made on both sides. Even the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which does not require genetically modified foods to be labeled, encourages food manufacturers to do so voluntarily because people are increasingly interested in knowing more about the food they're eating.

Opponents of labeling foods say it would present a logistical challenge and would create an added expense. But even more, they argue that foods made from genetically modified crops aren't materially different than foods made from non-genetically modified crops.

When a plant is genetically modified, it has a gene spliced into its genetic structure to produce a specific type of protein. The human body digests those proteins just like any other protein — it can't detect if a gene or protein is from a genetically modified food or not. Requiring a label, some say, would potentially cause unneeded alarm among consumers: Some consumers will take the label as a warning, and they'll avoid the product even though authorities, including the FDA, the American Medical Association, the National Academy of Sciences and the World Health Organization, aren't questioning the safety of such products.

Still, some (perhaps many) consumers simply would like to know if their food is made from genetically modified crops. Some have concerns about potential environmental impacts. Others wonder about long-term effects of consuming food from crops produced in this way — something that has happened just in the past two decades and is now prolific. It's estimated that 60 to 70 percent of the processed food on grocery store shelves have an ingredient, primarily corn, soy or canola, that's from a genetically modified crop.

To meet those consumers' demands, some manufacturers and retailers are discussing ways to voluntarily label products. And, some manufacturers are reformulating some products to be free of genetically modified ingredients. In addition, consumers can choose to purchase "USDA Certified Organic" products, which are required to be free of genetically modified ingredients.

For more information, see a recently updated fact sheet, "The Impact on Human Health of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Foods," from Ohio State University Extension available to download at <http://go.osu.edu/GMO>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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