

Does Your Food Contain Genetically Modified Organisms?

By [Rady Ananda](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

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Okay, here's your chance, with a new way for you to know that your food does not contain genetically modified organisms. The [Non-GMO Project](#), a collection of top suppliers and advocates in the organic industry, and the only no-GMO certifier in North America, has kicked off a GM-free month.

Ruh-roh — October includes Halloween. Since half of the refined sugar in the US is genetically modified, coming from GM sugar beets, finding GM-free candy might be a little hard. Though GM beets are [now illegal](#) until further notice, what's on the shelves today is most likely made from last year's crops.

The [NGP product page](#) lets you see what's already verified as being GMO-free and what's under review. You could pass out candy bars made by:

[Endangered Species Chocolates](#)

[EnviroKids Organic](#)

[Luna & Larry's Coconut Bliss](#)

[So Delicious](#)

[Funky Monkey Snacks](#)

[Taste of Nature's](#) 100% certified organic exotic bars are also vegan and Kosher.

Communications Director for the Non-GMO Project, Skylar Boorman, told [Food Freedom](#), "Through our Product Verification Program, a growing number of products have become 'Non-GMO Project Verified' and bear our seal." Right now, that's 69 vendors, he said, amounting to over 900 products verified so far. One company, [365 Everyday Value](#), submitted over 700 of its products for review, with 29 now GM-free verified.

The non-profit has a technical advisory team that reads like a who's who of the organic industry. That includes regional organic alliances, universities and names like Whole Foods, Nature's Way, Organic Valley, Nature's Path, Whole Soy, and Newman's Own Organic. Six committees review different aspects of food: Growers & Producers, Processors & Manufacturers, Vitamins & Supplements, Seed, Livestock, and a Policy Committee.

The Public Has a Right to Know

By creating a non-GMO verification *program*, NGP avoids FDA policy to [hide GM food](#). Boorman explains, "Our label was specifically designed to be a process claim ("Non-GMO Project Verified") and not an absence claim."

The right-to-know issue is significant. The FDA considers claims of “GMO free” and “Non-GMO” to be “not technically accurate” and “misleading.” Firstly, that’s because the [FDA believes](#) “the use of bioengineering is not a material fact.” The FDA recognizes no difference in GM and non-GM foods. They are “[substantially equivalent](#).”

Secondly, the FDA subscribes to a definition for genetically modified food that is broadly outside the scope of everyone else’s understanding:

“‘Genetic modification’ means the alteration of the genotype of a plant using any technique, new or traditional.”

While the public uses the terms ‘genetically modified’ and ‘genetically engineered’ interchangeably to mean the DNA was *directly* manipulated, the FDA does not. Conveniently, the FDA does not apply such a broad definition to the term ‘biotechnology.’ But, aren’t all plant breeding technologies ‘biotechnology’ by the same broad standard that the FDA applies to ‘genetic modification’?

Thirdly, the FDA asserts that food can accidentally become contaminated with GMOs, so vendors can’t claim their products are GM-free unless they’ve undergone extensive testing and verification. That’s an interesting admission on the part of the FDA. Now, the FDA recognizes a material difference between GM and non-GM foods. Now, substantial equivalence doesn’t apply.

When GM crops contaminate natural ones, courts recognize a [substantial](#) and [patent](#) difference between them. Already at the appellate level, an Ohio district court just rejected [a similar ban](#) (claiming milk is rBST-free), saying it was “more extensive than necessary to serve the state’s interest in preventing consumer deception.”

Human and Environmental Health

There’s also the food safety factor to keep in mind. GM crops ([trees](#), too) are genetically modified to produce or tolerate pesticides. Glyphosate, the main ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup, has been [linked to birth defects, cancer and miscarriages](#) in humans.

Other studies have linked GM-foods to [organ damage](#) and [sterility](#) in mammals, while others correlate rising [diabetes and obesity](#) rates with GMO introduction. There’s also the question of [allergic reaction to GM foods](#), proof of which is hidden by lack of labeling.

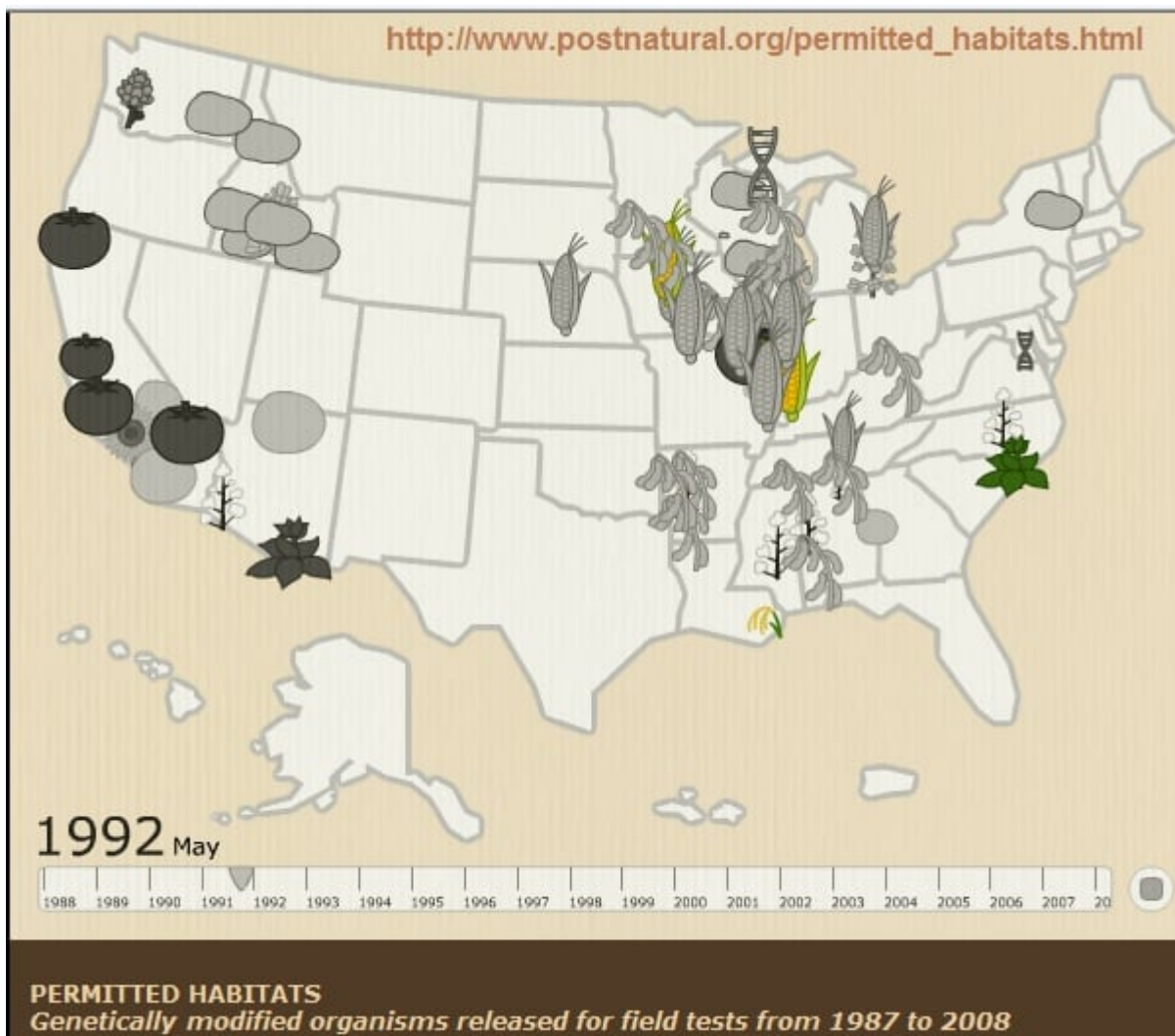
Environmental concerns cannot be ignored, either. [Pesticides are suspected](#) in causing or contributing to mass bee, bat and butterfly die-off, as well as a pandemic amphibian decline. This is ecologically critical — loss of pollinators will cause an Extinction Level Event that takes out most life on Planet Earth. That includes humans, as our food supply disappears. Remember, extinction is forever. No species has ever re-emerged after going extinct.

The Sun Is Fading on Biotechnology

Biotechnology may have had its day in the sun, but that light is fading. The [New York Times](#) reported Monsanto’s stock dropped from a peak of \$145 a share in 2008 to under \$48 a share on Monday. The [Christian Science Monitor](#) noted that “the rapid increase in the percentage of US farm acres planted with biotech crops has slowed. It rose only 1 percent

last year, from 85 percent to 86 percent, the smallest increase since 2001.”

Check out this [interactive map](#) of the history of GMO releases in the US from 1987 thru 2008:



Cataloguing the problems of the biotech industry, CSM states:

“Corn Belt farmers complain loudly about the soaring cost of seed. The federal government is investigating the industry for anticompetitive practices. Farmers are grappling increasingly with weeds that have grown resistant to Roundup, an herbicide widely used with genetically modified crops, and genetic contamination of conventional crops.”

Even the [United Nations rebuked biotechnology](#) this year when it concluded that agroecology “improves food production and farmers’ incomes while at the same time protecting the soil, water and climate.” The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, reported:

“The widest study ever conducted on the subject found that agroecological approaches resulted in an average crop yield gain of 79 per cent. The study covered 286 projects in 57 developing countries, representing a total surface of 37 million hectares.” (That’s over 91 million acres.)

Biotech [found a friend](#) in billionaire Bill Gates, however, so this fading light still has juice.

This is precisely why a home-grown solution like the [Non-GMO Project](#) can be so effective. By verifying which products are GM-free, NGP allows consumers to make informed choices, despite censorship by the FDA.

Use NPG's [PDF shopping guide](#) or their [iPhone app](#) to find products verified as GM-free. The [Rodale Institute](#), also involved with NGP, advises to buy organic and grass-fed. Check the PLU code:

"GMO foods contain the number 8 before the four-digit code printed on the produce sticker. Organic foods contain the number 9."

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