

The Deception of Food Labels

Dear Food Shoppers,

Lately, I have been a tad bit exasperated as I walked through aisles of my local grocery store. I am a farmer and I am writing this letter to express my frustration with what I see happening in grocery stores. No, this letter isn't going to cause you more food fear. In fact, just quite the opposite. Rest assured, I am as frustrated as you are and I hate the deception of food labels.

The Deception of Food Labels: Organic

No, I am not going to tell you to not buy organic. Please, buy what you want and what you like. But if you buy organic because you are afraid of non-organic, relax. ALL food in grocery stores is safe.

You probably are asking yourself, what about all the chemicals and pesticides?

It's okay, that's a normal response. Organic does not mean "no pesticides." [All farmers use pesticides, including organic](#). Sometimes those pesticides are more toxic than synthetic pesticides traditional farmers use.

What about nutritional value? Isn't organic more nutritional?

According to a Harvard study, [organic foods are not more nutritional than conventional](#).

When should I buy organic?

I think it all boils down to what is right for you and your family. Personally, the only food item I buy that is organic is [Whole Grain Milling](#) tortilla chips. They are produced by a local farm (only a few miles from my home) and they taste *really* good. Plain and simple, that's why I buy them and I will pay extra for that.

But, if you live on a short budget, please, please do not feel guilty about not buying organic. It's okay. No, it's really okay. Our food is safe, organic or conventional. My best advice to moms is to just buy more fruits and vegetables. Period. We know eating more fruits and vegetables is good for all of us, so just concentrate on that regardless of the label.

The Deception of Food Labels: Non-GMO Project

This one drives me bananas. This label is slapped onto many food items. There are more than

43,000 items verified non-GMO.



Non-GMO Project

So what is the problem?

Here is my frustration. Many of the food items this sticker is placed on do not have a GMO counterpart. For example, Dole puts this label on their peaches. But there is NO GMO peaches. So why the label? People will tell you it's all about people wanting transparency. I happen to think it's all about marketing—scaring people into buying their product.

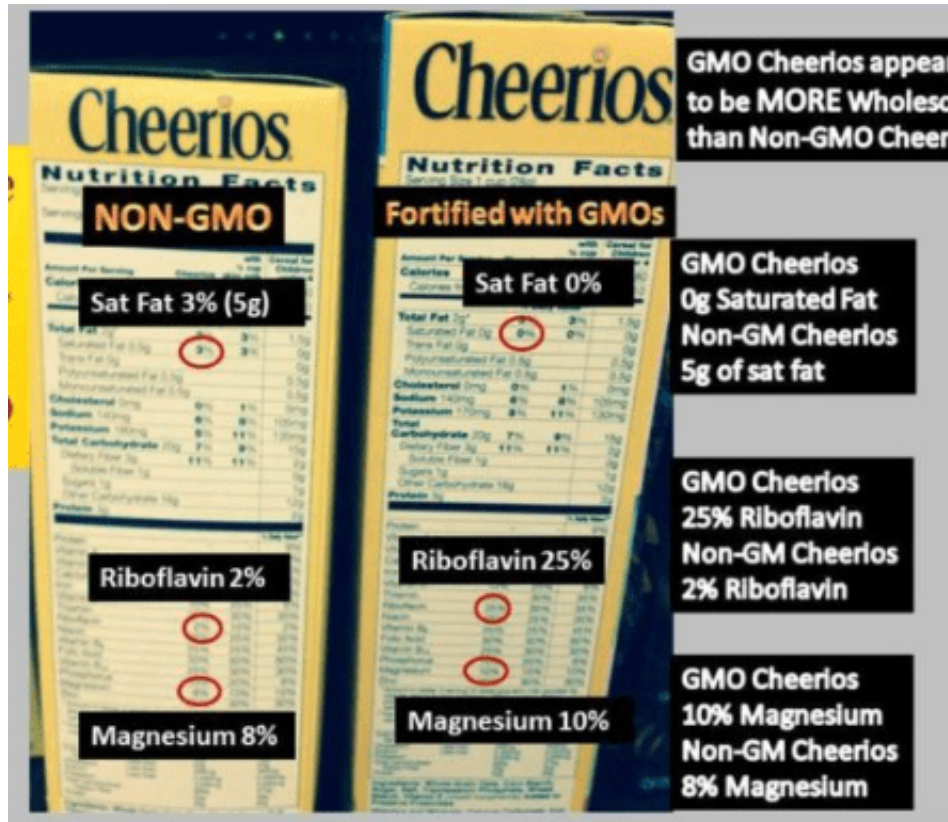
Dole, please educate your customers.

What I would like to see is companies like Dole take a leadership role to help educate their customers. Tell their customers that GMOs are in fact, safe. No, this doesn't match their strategy. Fear marketing sells. Emotions sell. Pretty obvious what they are doing.

Another issue is what we are seeing when companies switch their products to nonGMOs. Think it's more nutritious? Think again.

Reformulations

As companies are reformulating their products to nonGMO, the resulting products are less nutritious.



GMO and nonGMO foods comparisons – Image from GeneticLiteracyProject.org

What is the alternative?

I personally won't buy items that have the Non-GMO project label on it. I will buy another brand or the store brand, whichever brand that does not carry the Non-GMO Project Certified label. I refuse to buy into the fear marketing.

The Deception of Food Labels: Meat Packages

The meat counter is another area that I am completely frustrated with. Again, marketers using [labels](#) to confuse consumers or cause them to buy specific products based on fears. Here is a perfect example:

Here is a Butterball turkey that was in the meat counter a few years ago. Notice the label that says "raised without hormones?" The turkey next to it (store brand) did not have a label that said "raised without hormones." Now if I was a consumer and I did not realize it's illegal to give poultry hormones, I may assume the store brand (with no label) contains hormones because it lacks the label. And I don't want to buy meats that were "raised with hormones," so I probably will buy the one with the label.

But this way of thinking is simply not true. The truth is . . .

All poultry and pork is raised without hormones.



All Turkeys are Raised WITHOUT additional Hormones

And what about all the other labels? Natural? Grass-Fed? No Antibiotics? Locally Grown? Free-Range?

What the hell am I buying? And what should I buy?

I get it. As a pig farmer the last thing I want is consumers walking away from the meat counter because they are SO confused and frustrated from the meat labels. But I want to assure you that all grocery store meat is safe. In fact . . .

I am a grocery store farmer.

We sell our pigs to Hormel and much of their meat goes to restaurants and grocery stores. I know the extent of care our pigs receive and know for a fact that we raise quality pork, right along with my fellow pig farmers. I would not think twice about buying grocery store meat. In fact, I do, especially when there are sales. I have a hard time walking away from meat sales!

So the bottom line is, buying meat from your local grocery store meat counter is okay. I hear all the time that you need to buy from a local farmer because only then can you trust your food supply. That's great. I would never disagree with buying directly from a farmer. But please don't feel guilty or bad about buying from the grocery store. And just because I sell my pork to Hormel does not make me any less of a farmer. We can be trusted too.

So even though I am often frustrated with what I see in the grocery store, I just would encourage people to ask questions, research, [use critical thinking skills](#) or [reach out to a farmer](#). Farmers are really your friends. We would love to answer your questions and show you what we do and why.

Sincerely,

A Farmer

For more information:

[What's on that Meat Label?](#)





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