

Biological Farmers of Australia Media Release, 19th November 2009

A win for consumer choice; Major food brands commit to GE-free; Under loose labelling laws, organic remains the best guarantee

A commitment by four major food brands to avoid GMOs* is a win for consumers wishing to avoid GMOs in their diet. With a large number of common foods now containing GMOs and in the absence of comprehensive GM labelling laws in Australia, consumers are increasingly opting to go organic.

The 2010 Truefood Guide released by Greenpeace recently, which rates over one thousand of Australia's top food and beverage brands for the presence of GE ingredients, reveals the welcome news that four leading food brands are turning their back on genetically engineered (GE) ingredients – for the Australian market.

Nestlé, Foster's, Schweppes and Lindt have undertaken to keep their Australian brands free from GE ingredients, joining other prominent Australian brands that include Milo, Uncle Toby's cereal, VB and Peters Ice Cream. In the current marketplace state of play, this is a significant step and win for consumers seeking no GMOs.

Despite this latest win, GMOs are increasingly finding their way into many common foods. Equally disturbing is the fact that due to loose labelling laws in Australia most foods aren't required to declare that ingredients are GM on labelling, and consumers end up unwittingly consuming GMOs.

This year's commercial crops of canola from NSW and Victoria will find their way into pasta sauces, breads, cakes, baby food, oils and margarines. Conversely, the Irish government, in banning the cultivation of all GM crops, has joined Germany, Romania, Italy, Poland, France, Greece, Austria and Hungary as the ninth country to take a decision against the commercial planting of all, or a specific GM crop.

Australians who want to avoid GM food for health, environmental or ethical reasons have little option but to follow guides such as the True Food Guide or look for certified organic alternatives.

Biological Farmers of Australia is Australia's largest representative group for organics. The group owns the Australian Certified Organic logo which is seen on around 80% of organic food products in the marketplace.

BFA General Manager Holly Vyner says "the move by four major brands to go GMO- free is indicative that consumer concern about GMOs is not lessening.



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“Sixty-five per cent of consumers perceive the fact that organic food does not contain GMOs to be a benefit. This is amongst the many and varied benefits that organic provides to consumers including no synthetic farm chemicals, free of artificial additives, environmentally friendly, animal welfare, antibiotic-free meat and biodiversity benefits.”

Nutritionist for Biological Farmers of Australia Shane Heaton says that the decision by the four major food brands is a welcome move.

“The Australian organic industry has always taken the precautionary principle against GMOs and welcomes the companies’ decision,” he says. “As yet, the health and environmental implications of GM are unknown, though research in the public domain indicates that there are potential negative health implications.

“It is for this reason that the Organic Standard has excluded GMOs from organic produce, just as it has excluded food additives and synthetic pesticides.”

In the absence of comprehensive labelling laws for GM ingredients in food, consumers have two options for avoiding GMOs: to avail themselves of the Greenpeace Truefood pocket guide (www.truefood.org.au) - or to look for an organic certification logo such as the Australian Certified Organic “Bud” logo on foods. Organic certification “ticks all the boxes” of food integrity for the health conscious and ethical consumer.

*GMO Genetically Modified Organism

SOURCES:

Greenpeace media release; Corporate giants Nestlé, Schweppes and Fosters commit to GE-free ingredients; Sydney, Wednesday, 28 October, 2009; Greenplanet.net (<http://en.greenplanet.net/food/gmo/1028-irelandtoo-approves-a-gmo-free-policy.html>).

BFA Organic Standard http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?sec_id=135

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