



## Do you know what's in Your Food?

by Katie O'Sullivan

Do you know what goes into the food you're eating this holiday season?

Over the last twenty years, more and more of the crops in the U.S. grow from genetically engineered seeds (GE) or genetically modified organisms (GMO). Seventy percent of all processed foods contain GE ingredients, not including those that specifically say "certified organic" or "No GMOs."

In practical terms, seventy percent means each of us has GMO foods in our cupboards but don't realize it.

The food industry modifies crops through genetic engineering to make them more resistant to pests and disease while tolerating drought, cold and herbicides. In developing countries, some food, such as rice, is engineered to add more nutrients and vitamins than non-GMO rice. These seem like positive outcomes achieved by scientists – "Better living through chemistry," as one old ad used to say. In the U.S., food companies aren't required to tell us if they're using genetically altered ingredients. We have no real way of knowing, even though one study shows that 93% of American consumers would rather know if their food has been genetically engineered. (Source: [Nov 2010 Thomson Reuters NPR survey](#)). Other countries have different ideas – in many parts of the world, manufacturers are required to disclose whether there are GE ingredients in products.

Genetically modified food labeling is currently mandatory in more than 40 countries worldwide, including the 15 countries in the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China. Parts of Europe are now considering a ban on GMO crops entirely.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) doesn't seem to think GMO foods are a problem – or that they need to be labeled to let the consumer know what they are buying.

As long as GE crops look, smell, and taste the same as their non-GE counterparts, and have roughly the same nutritional value, the FDA doesn't require labeling.

But how do consumers know these products are safe in the long term for our bodies and our environment? And what kind of rules regulate the GMO industry?

GMO crops have the potential to introduce new toxins or allergens into our food and environment. Yet unlike the FDA's strict safety evaluations for approval of new drugs, there are no mandatory human clinical trials of GE crops.

There are no tests for carcinogenicity or harm to fetuses, no long term testing for human health risks, and only very limited, short term testing on animals, and testing for allergenicity.





No Labels, by Sebastian Francis-Burnell

To date, there have been no large-scale public health studies published that look at possible impacts to human health because of the consumption of GE crops.

According to the consumer watchdog group [Just Label It](#), the use of GMO crops has definitely resulted in the increased use of hundreds of millions of pounds of herbicides in our country and around the world. Since the crops are modified to be herbicide resistant, farmers can be less careful in application. As a result, there is now an increase in the use of carcinogenic defoliants to control the resultant herbicide-tolerant weeds.

According to an August U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) report, the chemical glyphosate, also known by its tradename Roundup, is commonly found in rain and rivers in agricultural areas in the Mississippi River watershed. Glyphosate is used in almost all agricultural and urban areas of the United States.

The greatest glyphosate use is in the Mississippi River basin, where most applications are for weed control on GMO corn, soybeans and cotton. Overall, agricultural use of glyphosate has increased from less than 11,000 tons in 1992 to more than 88,000 tons in 2007. (Source: August 2011 U.S. [Geological Survey press release](#)) In July 2011, the Just Label It organization filed a legal petition with the FDA to force companies to label their products that contain GMO ingredients. The petition doesn't call for the end of genetic engineering – just for giving people a choice. You can read the petition [here](#), and find out how to take action on this issue [here](#).

Signing the Just Label It petition is fast and easy – just a few clicks and you can add your voice to the chorus of consumers who just want to know what they're eating.

It's time for the FDA to catch up with the 21st century technologies. This starts by acknowledging that GE foods need to be labeled, so consumers can make informed decisions about whether to buy and eat them.

Katie O'Sullivan is the editor of this magazine. A mother of three and sister of an organic farmer, she believes in reading food labels and knowing where her food comes from.

She has two romantic suspense novels currently available on the CWO Bookshelf.

Follow her [blog](#) or reach her by email at [Katie@CapeWomenOnline.com](mailto:Katie@CapeWomenOnline.com) if you'd like to add your comments about this story to our [Letters page](#).