



US Organic Food Industry Fears GMO Contamination

by Carey Gillam

Widespread contamination of U.S. corn, soybeans and other crops by genetically engineered varieties is threatening the purity of organic and natural food products and driving purveyors of such specialty products to new efforts to protect their markets, industry leaders said this week.

A range of players, from dairy farmers to natural food retailers, are behind an effort to introduce testing requirements and standards for certification aimed at keeping contamination at bay. That goal is rapidly becoming harder, however, as planting of biotech corn, soybeans, and other crops expands across the United States.

"Now there is a real shortage of organic grain for animal husbandry and dairy operations," said Organic Consumers Association national director Ronnie Cummins. "People are having to be real careful."

Proponents of the plan are rolling it out this week at an industry meeting in Anaheim, California, seeking to get the entire organic and natural foods industry to agree on testing and standard certifications. Companies that get certified will be allowed to use a seal designating as much on their products.

"We think we can keep the contamination from getting worse by putting safeguards in place so people who want to choose to eat organic products free of genetic contamination can do so," said Michael Funk, CEO of United Natural Foods, which is backing the initiative. "The longer we delay ... the more challenging it is going to be."

Biotech crops, primarily corn, soybeans, cotton and canola, have genes that have been manipulated to express specific traits, most commonly a resistance to herbicide, which helps farmers. Biotech developers such as Monsanto Co patent the crop technology and tightly control use of the seed.

But mixing of biotech crops and conventional crops can occur during many phases of harvest, storage and shipment of grain, and drifting pollen and other natural forces can also contaminate crops while they are still in the fields.

Indeed, contamination of conventional crops by biotech crops has been reported around the world. There were 39 cases of crop contamination in 23 countries in 2007, and more than 200 in 57 countries over the last 10 years, according to biotech critic Greenpeace International.

Contamination of corn is the biggest concern for those trying to sell biotech-free food. Corn is not only used in human food but is also used to feed livestock, meaning organic beef and dairy farmers must ensure their animals are fed corn that is free of contamination.

That has become more difficult as biotech corn acres have expanded in the United States. In 2007, an estimated 73 percent of the 92.9 million acres of U.S. corn planted were biotech, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The USDA has a set of national standards for foods labeled "organic" as part of its marketing service, but the industry players seeking independent testing said the USDA has not gone far enough to require organic and natural foods are free from biotech contamination.

Organic dairy farmer Albert Straus, who started testing corn fed to his 300-head dairy herd more than a year ago, and found about one-third had been contaminated, now tests every lot of grain he buys.

"I started to test our products to see if there was an issue or not. It turned out there was an issue," said Straus. He is now adding a label to his dairy products to alert consumers to the extra level of caution. "There is so much contamination," he said.

Editing by John Picinich

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Lower Eastern Shore Going Green Festival October 10/11th at WWCC.

Interested in greening your business or dreaming of a green business? Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore and Eco-Ventures are teaming up to stimulate the green economy here of the Eastern Shore! Free workshops but pre-registration is required. For more info visit www.eco-ventures.org/lowereasternshore.

Summer Vegetable Gratin

4 side dish servings

1 eggplant, stemmed, peeled, cut crosswise into 1/8-1/4 inch slices
8 large basil leaves, cut into chiffonade (stacked, rolled tightly, cut into thin strips)
4 T Parmesan cheese (or more)
Fresh ground pepper, kosher salt
2+ T extra-virgin olive oil
1 patty pan squash (or zucchini) trimmed, cut crosswise into 1/8-1/4 inch slices
1 sweet onion, stemmed, cut crosswise into 1/8-1/4 inch slices
1 large sweet pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into strips
1 yellow or red tomato, cored, cut crosswise into 1/8-1/4 inch slices
2 T plain fine dried breadcrumbs

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-10 inch baking dish with nonstick spray. Create a single layer of eggplant slices in the bottom of the dish; the slices should overlap only at the edges. Sprinkle ¼ of cut basil over the slices, then 1T of Parmesan; season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle a teaspoon or two of oil over the layer. Repeat with the squash, onion, pepper, and tomato slices.

Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top, seasoning with salt and pepper to taste, and then scatter the breadcrumbs evenly over the cheese. Drizzle about 2t of oil over the top, and then cover the dish tightly with foil. Bake for 30-40 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Remove the foil; and bake 15-20 more minutes until the excess moisture in the bottom of the dish has gone and the top begins to brown.

Let sit about 15 minutes before serving. Cut with a knife and use spatula to transfer to plates.

From the Washington Post Food Section Stephanie Witt Sedgwick

In Your Share This Week:

Tomatoes
Eggplant
Acorn Squash
Broccoli*
Kale*
Turnips*
*perhaps

Butternut Squash Soup

¼ cup butter
2 ½ cups chopped leeks (white part only ~ sweet onions also work)
2 pounds butternut squash, peeled, seeded and chopped
5 cups chicken broth
Salt, fresh ground pepper to taste (I didn't add)
Snipped chives (optional)

In a Dutch oven melt butter, add leeks and cook until very soft but not brown, stirring often. Add the butternut squash and broth. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Cover and simmer 15-20 minutes until squash is tender. In a food processor or blender, puree the mixture until very smooth. Season soup if desired with salt and pepper. Garnish with chives.

ATTENTION ALL CSA MEMBERS!

We're looking for volunteers to:

- 1) Coordinate a pumpkin party for the afternoon of 10/18 at Ted's farm. This will involve getting fall/Halloween crafts and activities together for the kids. Ted will have organic pumpkins for sale for CSA members to purchase.
- 2) Organize and coordinate the end of year pot luck. The date is November 23.

Please let me know - aliebman@comcast.net or 410.860.9850

Thanks, Amy