

Whole Foods, UNFI to test all private-label products for GM contamination

The Non-GMO Project also signs on Eden Foods, Lundberg Family Farms

by Sustainable Food News
March 9, 2007



Whole Foods Markets, Inc. and United Natural Foods, Inc. will test their entire private-label organic and natural food lines to ensure products contain no genetically modified organisms (GMO), and called on the rest of the natural and organic foods industry to participate in an industry-wide migration to verified non-GMO products.

The move was announced late Friday during a conference at the Natural Products Expo West trade show in Anaheim, Calif., and comes just days after Marshall, Calif.-based Straus Family Creamery said it was America's first certified-organic food manufacturer to ensure that all its products are verified as non-GMO under a new standard administered by The Non-GMO Project, a non-profit based in Berkeley, Calif.

Michael Funk, UNFI's chief executive officer, told a standing-room-only crowd to much applause. "We are at the point where we can turn the tide right now. We want everyone playing by the same rules."

Eden Foods and Lundberg Family Farms also announced Friday their products will also be tested to ensure no GMO contamination.

Currently, about 90 percent of soybeans and 60 percent of corn grown in the United States are genetically engineered, and Funk said the "ability to contaminate the supply is increasing."

The new verification process was developed by experts in GMO control and identification, Food Chain Global Advisors, and adheres to a product evaluation program for non-GMO verification that tests products for GMO contaminants up to a 0.1 percent threshold. Companies passing the verification process will be allowed to bear the non-profit's verification and compliance seal on product labels. Straus Family Creamery will start affixing the label on products within the next 60 days, Albert Straus, president of Straus Family Creamery, told **Sustainable Food News**.

A Whole Foods representative at the conference declined to talk to **SFN** about its plans, but Megan Thompson, the non-profit's director, said the world's largest natural and organic foods retailer will test all its products sold under the 365 private-label brand.

She also said UNFI will test food products it produces and sells under brands it owns, including Albert's Organics. Both companies, she said, would not require suppliers to submit to the verification process but will "strongly encourage" they do so.

"This program will function as an additional quality-assurance program for our customers," said Straus. "People want to avoid GMOs and know that GMOs are excluded from organic foods. We are making sure that our products meet this expectation fully. The integrity of the organic movement cannot be damaged by the presence of GMOs."