

GMOS IN YOUR FOOD: HIDDEN INGREDIENTS, UNKNOWN CONSEQUENCES¹

Emily Main[©]

This Sunday, 10-10-10, has been designated by the climate-change nonprofit 350.org as a day for people around the world to install solar panels, plant gardens, and make their homes more energy-efficient. But if you don't have the time or resources for a major project, there is one simple step you can take: Buy only non-genetically modified food.

THE DETAILS: Speaking at the Solebury School in New Hope, PA, on Wednesday night, Robert Kenner, the director of the documentary *Food Inc.* noted that 53 percent of all the farmland in this country is dedicated to corn and soy, two of the most commonly genetically modified crops grown in the U.S. And, according to the nonprofit Organic Center, genetically modified (GM) soy made up 92 percent of all the soy planted; GM corn represented 63 percent of all the corn planted.

This heavy reliance on two crops is having serious effects on our food system and, potentially, our climate. Though there isn't hard evidence that the use of genetically modified crops is contributing to climate change, "the use of GMO crops should be viewed in the context of a much larger and complex system that is indicative of a broken food system," says Jeff Moyer, farm director at The Rodale Institute, which has operated a long-running farm-systems trial comparing organic and conventional growing methods. For instance, he adds, the use of genetically modified crops allows farmers to plant a single crop on a huge plot of land. "This system then encourages farmers to move away from diversified production systems or systems that may include livestock," he says. "That, in turn, allows for the concentration of animals into ever-larger production facilities, removing them entirely from the farm itself. And that has had a negative effect on greenhouse-gas accumulation in the atmosphere leading to climate change." GM crops also require more synthetic pesticides, which are derived from fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

Increasing reliance on genetically modified crops also makes it harder for farmers to cope with the effects of climate change. The European division of Greenpeace has found in studies conducted around the world that diverse farming systems see higher crop yields in diversified production systems during conditions of drought or disease than they do in genetically modified, mono-crop systems.

And as anyone who's seen the film *Food Inc.* knows, corn and soy are being pumped into people via processed foods and farm-factory animals that feed off corn and soy and a high cost to society, feeding diseases like diabetes and hypertension.

WHAT IT MEANS: "There is a real high cost to our low-cost food system," Kenner said, adding that the average American pays 9 percent of his income on food but 18 percent on medical care and pharmaceuticals. "Even if you're eating out of your garden, you're affected by this," he said, "because your taxes are paying for health care."

¹ Rodale News, October 08, 2010

We're just now starting to see the effects of our industrial food system, which really took hold 50 years ago, said Kenner, and we may not start to see the effects of GMOs on human health for decades, considering they were first approved just 14 years ago. So in effect, we're all participating in a grand experiment on how genetically modified crops will impact our health and our environment. And, like lab rats, we're being given a choice.

Here are two ways to combat climate change and health problems by opting out of the GMO experiment:

Demand organic. The only way to know for sure that your food is free of GMOs is to buy certified-organic products, which aren't permitted to contain engineered ingredients. In the event that you can't find an organic version of what you want, look for the Non-Gmo Project Verified seal.

Demand better labeling. One of the most frightening moments Kenner says he had while filming *Food Inc.* was a California state hearing on whether or not it should be required for meat producers to label cloned meat (a form of genetic engineering) as such. "When I was sitting in that courtroom and heard an industry representative say, 'We don't think it's in the consumer's best interest to give them that kind of information,' I realized there was something seriously wrong," he said. "If genetic engineering is so good, why can't we find out if it's in our food?" Recently, a landmark judgement in Ohio determined it's OK for dairy product manufacturers to label milk products as rBST- or rBGH-free. Which may pave the way for food manufacturers to label other GMO-free foods, whether it's veggies or salmon, without fear of being sued by Monsanto or another gigantic GMO-seed producer. (Their argument is that "GMO-free" labels indicate that genetically engineered foods are of inferior quality and are less safe than their counterparts.)