

GET THE FACTS

ABOUT ORGANICS IN ALBERTA



LET'S TALK ABOUT GMOs

ORGANIC MEANS NON-GMO

Did you know that organic is one of the only ways to ensure that your food does not contain GMOs? That is because the Canadian Government under the Canada Organic Regulation prohibits the use of GMOs in organic products. This is done to preserve the natural growing processes that are core to the Canadian Organic Standards.

Organic farmers maintain a healthy environment using natural methods and techniques. In organics, it is all about healthy soil and healthy systems. For example, crop rotation is often used to prevent weed problems and to help plants mature and thrive naturally.

LABELLING: IS GMO LABELLED IN CANADA?

Food producers and retailers are held accountable in Canada to ensure that their food labels are not misleading in any way. However, there are no regulations in Canada that specify a producer has to label a product as containing GMO ingredients. In 2004, Canada introduced a voluntary labelling of products containing GMO or non-GMO products. In order to state that claim, the products must be 95% GMO-free. In the marketplace you will see some non-GMO labelled

products which will meet or exceed that standard. However, since organic prohibits the use of GMOs, just look for the Canada Organic Logo!

SO WHAT ARE GMOs ANYHOW?

Now you know that organic does not contain GMOs, but you are probably asking, "but what are GMOs anyhow?" The World Health Organization defines GMOs as:

Genetically modified (GM) foods are foods derived from organisms whose genetic material (DNA) has been modified in a way that does not occur naturally, e.g. through the introduction of a gene from a different organism.

You may hear various terms to describe GMOs, such as Genetically Modified Organism (GMO), Genetically Modified (GM) Foods, or Genetic Engineering (GE). They all generally refer to this same process of seeds or ingredients that have had their genetic traits altered through a non-natural method.

This differs from the traditional change of genetic material that occurs in all plants and animals slowly over time through natural selection or genetic evolution. It also differs from traditional cross-breeding which is the



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intentional choice to breed two plants together in order to obtain a desired result. In GMOs that genetic material is changed through a laboratory based process, such as, for example, a new gene is spliced into the plant, usually from an organism that would not naturally be able to breed with that plant.

WHAT GMOS ARE ALLOWED IN CANADA?

Conventional farming practices in Canada allows for the use of GMO. However, not all conventional farming is GMO. The GM crops grown in Canada include canola, corn, soy, sugar beets and GE alfalfa (for animal feed only). However, foods that are grown in other parts of the world that are GM and that can be sold in Canada include papaya (from Hawaii), squash (from the US), cottonseed oil (from the US, China and India), and Atlantic salmon (raised in Panama). Nationally, Health Canada assesses, monitors and controls the use of GMOs in all food production and deems it to be safe for human consumption. Approved GMO products in Canada are regulated and recorded.

WHY ARE GMOS USED?

Farmers in Alberta have a lot to deal with. From rapidly

changing weather and unpredictable seasons to weeds and pests, it can be difficult to manage large fields. Modifying species allows scientists to add desirable traits and reduce or eliminate undesirable traits, which can optimize plants for certain conditions. One way to deal with this is to use Genetic Modification.

For example, a herbicide-resistant canola variety makes conventional farming easier because farmers can spray these canola crops with approved herbicides, killing off weeds but not the crop itself. Farmers may also want crops modified for virus resistance, pest resistance, drought resistance, vitamin enrichment, and the faster maturation of plants.

YOUR FOOD, YOUR CHOICE

Canadians want to know what's in their food. Now that you know where you can and can't find GMO products, you're armed with the facts to make informed decisions at the grocery store. Keep in mind that all Canadian food (including imports) is monitored by Health Canada to ensure it's safe for your plate. However, if you should still choose to buy non-GMO, choose organic!



WAYS TO LEARN MORE

Do you want to learn more about what organically-grown means in Alberta? Would you value monthly updates on Alberta's local organic sector – including legislation, farming practices, GMO regulation, and more? Visit organicalberta.org/getthefacts and:

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