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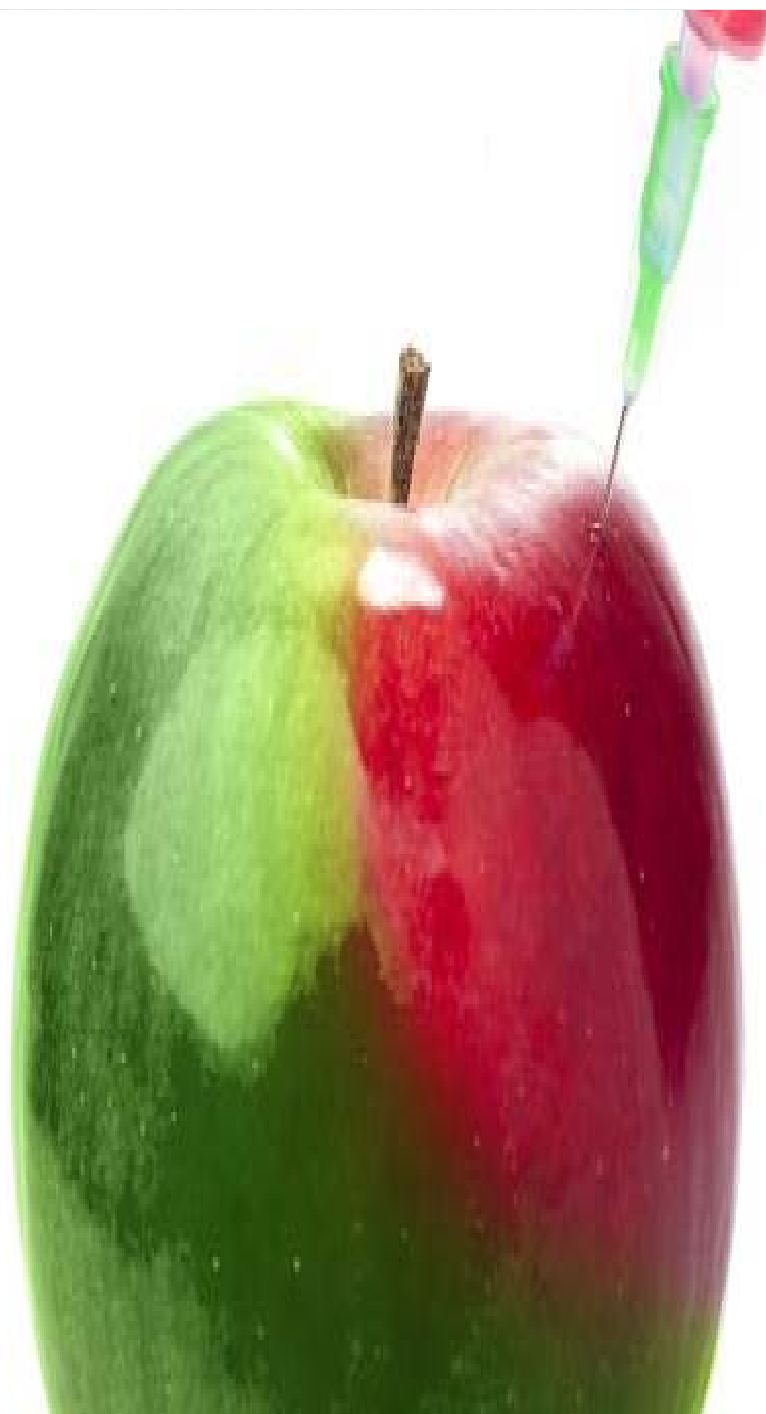
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Non-GMO Demand Soars Despite Lack of Consumer Understanding

Disconnect exists between experts', consumers' opinions

August 19, 2016, 03:56 pm By Randy Hofbauer, Progressive Grocer





Recent years have seen steadily rising demand for products without genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Sales of food labeled “non-GMO” grew more than \$8 billion between 2012 and mid-2016, reaching \$21.1 billion, according to supermarket scan data from Schaumburg, Ill.-based research firm **Nielsen**.

But what’s driving such dramatic growth? Carl Jorgensen, director, global thought leadership with Stamford, Conn.-based **Daymon Worldwide**, says the cause is simple: GMOs are a “stand-in” for Big Government, Big Agriculture and Big Food. And consumer distrust of these three institutions is skyrocketing.

“Consumers may not understand exactly what GMOs are,” he notes, “but they have an instinctive aversion to the idea of genetically engineered food.”

In fact, consumers are losing trust even in the face of expert opinions on the matter. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, 57 percent of U.S. consumers consider eating genetically modified foods “generally unsafe,” even though only 11 percent of scientists with the American Association for the Advancement of Science feel the same. Additionally, a February 2016 report from Rockville, Md.-based market researcher Packaged Facts found that 26 percent of U.S. adults believe that non-GMO labeling is an especially important factor when choosing what foods to eat.

“Consumers want their foods to be more natural,” Jorgensen adds, “and GMOs are seen as not natural.”

Further, while no one really knows the effects of altering the DNA of organisms in food products, cancer incidence is on the rise, along with many food sensitivities and allergies, all of which are arousing suspicion.

“Only 20 percent of diagnosed cancers have known origins, and food allergies are growing at lighting speed, which leads one to think that maybe what we are altering in our food may be altering our health,” says Mary Vandewiele, co-owner of The Better Health Markets, in Novi, Mich.

Of all generations, Millennials are leading the demand for labels calling out GMOs. So whether GMOs are actually harmful, Millennials’ growing purchasing power means money does — and will continue to do — the talking here.

“The Millennials were the first generation to grow up with [the] awareness and knowledge [of GMOs], and will be leading the charge on cleaner products,” Vandewiele explains. “This will invariably put more pressure on companies to add more information to their labels or lose traction in the market.”

Retailers, Manufacturers Respond

Lou Biscotti, partner with Chicago-based research firm [WeiserMazars](#) and leader of its food and beverage national practice, has seen demand for such information grow. In the same way that retailers such as Austin, Texas-based Whole Foods Market and Monrovia, Calif.-based Trader Joe’s have focused marketing efforts on their extensive organic offerings, many retailers today are pushing suppliers for non-GMO products, understanding their profitability.

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About Randy Hofbauer

Randy Hofbauer is senior editor of Progressive Grocer. He has more than a decade of experience as a journalist and researcher, almost all of it covering CPG retailing.

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No, it's not so much a lack of understanding, but a desire to get back to eating local and organically grown foods.

This quote from your article says it all..."Further, while no one really knows the (long/short term) effects of altering the DNA of organisms in food products..."

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