



CAN GMOS BE USED IN ORGANIC PRODUCTS?



The use of genetic engineering, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs), is prohibited in organic products. This means an organic farmer can't plant GMO seeds, an organic cow can't eat GMO alfalfa or corn, and an organic soup producer can't use any GMO ingredients.

To meet the USDA organic regulations, farmers and processors must show they aren't using GMOs and that they are protecting their products from contact with prohibited substances from farm to table.

PREVENTION PRACTICES

Organic operations implement preventive practices based on site-specific risk factors, such as neighboring conventional farms or shared farm equipment or processing facilities. For example, farmers:

- Plant their seeds early or late to avoid organic and GMO crops flowering at the same time (which can lead to cross-pollination).
- Harvest crops prior to flowering or sign cooperative agreements with neighboring farms to avoid planting GMO crops next to organic ones.
- Designate the edges of their land as a buffer zone where the land is managed organically, but the crops aren't sold as organic.
- Thoroughly clean any shared farm or processing equipment to prevent unintended exposure to GMOs or prohibited substances.

All of these measures are documented in the organic

farmer's organic system plan. This written plan describes the substances and practices to be used, including physical barriers to prevent contact of organic crops with prohibited substances or the products of "excluded methods" such as GMOs.

OVERSIGHT

On-site inspections and records verify that farmers are following their organic system plan.

Additionally, certifying agents conduct residue testing to determine if these preventive practices are adequate to avoid contact with substances such as prohibited pesticides, antibiotics, and GMOs.

Any certified organic operation found to use prohibited substances or GMOs may face enforcement actions, including loss of certification and financial penalties. However, unlike many pesticides, there aren't specific tolerance levels in the USDA organic regulations for GMOs.

As such, National Organic Program policy states that trace amounts of GMOs don't automatically mean the farm is in violation of the USDA organic regulations. In these cases, the certifying agent will investigate how the inadvertent presence occurred and recommend how it can be better prevented in the future.

For example, they may require a larger buffer zone or more thorough cleaning of a shared grain mill.

CAN GMOS BE USED IN ORGANIC PRODUCTS (continued)?

Can you show me an example of how this would work?

In the sketch below, the organic farmer has set up several buffer zones to protect the integrity of her organic crops from GMOs. Where her farm borders the conventional farm, she has set aside an area which she will farm organically (for example, she won't apply prohibited pesticides), but she won't sell that land's crops as organic.

She has also posted "no spray" signs on the borders of her property and has another buffer zone on the left side to protect her farm from unintended substances from the local road. A final buffer zone on the right side of her property includes a row of trees to reduce erosion and protect runoff into the bordering river.

How is USDA working to further address this topic?

USDA supports all methods of agriculture production, including organic, conventional, and biotechnology. To help these different methods coexist better, USDA has convened an Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture ("AC21"). Organic stakeholders are well-represented on AC21.

Consumers purchase organic products expecting that they maintain their organic integrity from farm to market, and USDA is committed to meeting these expectations. No matter where it was grown, if a product has the USDA Organic label on it, it wasn't produced with GMOs.

