

WOOLWORTHS

WOOLWORTHS POSITION STATEMENT ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) FOODS

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in food is a topical issue and one that, we know, is of importance to many of our customers. Issues surrounding GMOs are a source of on-going debate in the community and remains topical in our current affairs.

Arguments against GMOs focus on safety, the effects on small farmers, possible cross breeding with other plants, the rise of antibiotic-resistance “superbugs” and pesticide resistant “superweeds”, unknown potential long-term risks on human health and the corporate privatisation of the food chain. While arguments in favour of GMOs focus on faster growth and maturity of plants, greater disease resistance and bigger yields, as benefits in the context of a growing population.

OUR COMMITMENT

We have undertaken to eliminate ingredients and additives derived from GM crops, used in the manufacture or preparation of a food product, from all Woolworths own brand food products and we continue to work hand-in-hand with our suppliers to ensure compliance to this.

Presently, none of Woolworths own brand products, which includes food, beverages and pet food, contain GM-crop derived ingredients.

We are committed to remain 100 % non-GM in our own brand product as long as we have sustainable and commercially viable alternatives. Should the situation change in the future, we undertake to clearly label those remaining products that contain ingredients from crops which have been genetically modified, so that consumers are empowered to make informed choices when shopping.

Where we cannot guarantee that the ingredient was not derived from a GM crop, we would label the relevant ingredient in the product's ingredient statement as “Genetically Modified (GM)”.

Woolworths is committed to empowering our customers to choose for themselves by providing accurate and informative labelling, in line with labelling legislation and regulations.

TRANSPARENCY AND REPORTING

Woolworths will remain transparent about the proportion of private label products containing ingredients from potential GM crop sources. We will provide information on our progress in our annual Good Business Journey Report, available on [Woolworths Holdings Limited](#) website.

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WOOLWORTHS

GMOs: WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

The issues surrounding GMOs are a source of ongoing debate in the community and one that we know concerns many Woolworths customers.

- **What does the term GMO stand for and why is it such a controversial issue?**

GMO stands for "genetically modified organisms", and foods that contain ingredients with GMOs are considered GMO foods. In South Africa the only crops that may be genetically modified are soybeans, maize and cotton.

GMOs are created in the laboratory when scientists isolate genes that are responsible for certain traits in one plant and insert the gene into another plant or add genes from non-plant organisms to a plant. Organisms that have been genetically modified include micro-organisms such as bacteria and yeast, plants and fish.

The key areas of controversy are:

1. Whether or how GM food should be labelled;
2. The role of government regulators;
3. The effect of GM crops on health and the environment;
4. The effect on pests and pesticide resistance;
5. The impact of GM crops for farmers; and
6. The role of GM crops in feeding the world population;
7. Ownership of the food supply chain (seed patents).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

The arguments against GMOs focus on:

1. Safety

The issue of safety of GMOs has been a concern since researchers first introduced them commercially in 1996 in the USA and in 1998 in South Africa. Government support for GM implies that there are no safety issues.

2. Effects on small farmers

Some of the arguments against the use of GMOs include industrialisation of agriculture, pushing out the small farmers in favour of mass production of crops due to legalities surrounding intellectual property and ownership of seeds. It should be noted that it's not only GMOs that contribute to these issues.

3. Potential "superbugs" and "superweeds"

Among critics' most serious charges are GMOs' potential to stimulate the rise of antibiotic-resistant "superbugs" and pesticide-resistant "superweeds" that require the use of increasingly powerful drugs and hazardous chemicals.



WOOLWORTHS

4. Possible “contamination” of other plants

One major concern is keeping genetically modified crops from entering the environment, where their DNA could mingle with the DNA of other plants. The effect that genetically modified DNA could have on other plants is currently unknown.

5. Potential long-term risks

Opponents of genetically modified food claim risks have not been adequately identified and managed. Some health groups say there are unanswered questions regarding the potential long-term impact on human health from food derived from GMOs, and propose mandatory labeling or a moratorium on such products.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR

The arguments in favour of GMO focus on:

1. Faster growth and maturity of plants

Supporters of GMO argue that genetically modified plants and animals that grow and mature faster with greater disease resistance and bigger yields are a strong argument in favour of GMO cultivation.

2. No risks to people and environment

There is significant scientific consensus that food derived from GM crops poses no greater risk than conventional food. No reports of ill effects have been proven in the human population from ingesting GM food.

3. Environmental benefits

There are environmental benefits to GM crops. Some GMO plants, for example, can be "designed" with a built-in resistance to insect pests. These plants need fewer pesticides, making them a greener choice for farmers than non-GMO crops that require pesticides. Plants and animals can also be genetically improved to grow in poorer soils, colder temperatures, drier climates and other less-than-favourable conditions. These GMO crops could have more nutrients and could also need less-intensive industrial processing. Proponents argue these are important benefits in a world where more than 7 billion people now need to be fed.

GMOs IN SOUTH AFRICA

The production of GM crops is supported by our government. In 1999 the Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Act of 1997 came into force, paving the way for the growth of the industry. The first GM crops were planted in 1998.

24 years later South Africa is the eighth largest producer of GMOs in the world. In 2017 alone South Africa produced 2.73 million hectares of GM crops. In 2011 the Consumer Protection Act came into force requiring that all foods containing 5% or more GMOs content must be labelled. There are different views on the interpretation of the legislation. We await clarity from government regulatory bodies on the contentious



WOOLWORTHS

issues. We will, however, continue to label the product (as we have been doing since 2000) Genetically Modified (GM)" where we cannot guarantee that an ingredient was not derived from a GM crop.

Percentage of South African crops that are genetically modified *

- 85 % Maize
- 95 % Soya
- 100% Cotton

These crops are the only ones containing genetically modified genes that are allowed to be grown in South Africa. There are no GM fruit or vegetables grown or on the market in South Africa.

*Ref.: www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/biotech_country_facts_and_trends/download/Facts%20and%20Trends%20-%20South%20Africa.pdf

Ends.

