

January 03, 2014

Cheerios Breakfast Cereal Cuts GMO Ingredients

by Steve Baragona (VOA)

Genetically modified ingredients have been eliminated from one of the best-known breakfast cereals in the United States after a year-long campaign from environmental groups. Food industry giant General Mills says it took genetically modified organisms (GMOs) out of its Cheerios brand not out of safety concerns, but in response to consumer demands.

Starting a little over a year ago, The “GMO Inside” environmental coalition rallied tens of thousands of consumers to flood the Cheerios Facebook page and call and email the company telling them to take GMOs out of the cereal.

“We just wanted to encourage General Mills to offer non-GMO Cheerios to consumers here in the United States just like they do in Europe,” said Todd Larsen, a coalition member with Green America. “And apparently tens of thousands of people agreed with us.”

Disputed claims

The campaign’s website says GMOs have “disastrous effects” on the environment and “increasing research is pointing to negative health impacts of consuming GMOs.”

The World Health Organization, the U.S. Institute of Medicine and regulatory agencies in Europe, the United States and Canada have said GMOs pose no more risk than conventional foods and have some environmental benefits.

“It’s clear from scientific and regulatory bodies that they are safe,” said General Mills spokesman Mike Siemienas. “But we value our Cheerios fans, and we listen to their thoughts and suggestions.”

Ingredient search

Going non-GMO was not easy. Nearly all the corn, soybeans and sugar beets grown in the U.S. are genetically modified, and 70 to 80 percent of supermarket products contain GMO ingredients. Cheerios are mostly *oats, and there are no GMO oat varieties.

Niche market

Non-GMO products have been gaining ground and space on supermarket shelves. Last year, major retailer Target introduced a line of non-GMO foods, fast-food chain Chipotle announced it is phasing out GMO ingredients, and products bearing the “Non-GMO Verified” seal were among the fastest growing categories.

*oats : avoine