

## **Chapter 8: GE-Free Farmers' Markets**

### **Introduction**

Farmers' markets are one of the most visible places where Americans are reclaiming local control of the food they eat and the crops that are grown in their environment. As a result, these markets are an excellent place for people concerned about genetically engineered foods to influence local food policy. There are a number of ways to move your farmers' market away from GE food like encouraging individual farms to make a GE-free pledge or advocating for the market to pass policies prohibiting GE foods from being sold.

GE-Free Farmers' Market campaigns are an effective way to engage farmers and consumers in an effort to advance local control over our food supply. For local groups, these campaigns are a good way to spur you to do outreach to your local farmers, who are directly impacted by genetic engineering. For farmers, passing GE-free policies at the local market can provide a marketing advantage and draw the growing number of Americans who are concerned about eating GE foods to buy from a likeminded farmer.

Remember that every local campaign like a GE-free farmers' market gains enormous power when it gets covered in the media. You can inspire others to work to pass similar policies at another farmers' market and help raise public awareness about the hazards of genetic engineering. Additionally, you will add to the growing national narrative about community resistance to genetic engineering.

This chapter provides materials for advancing the campaign such as literature for consumers and a sample farmer pledge form. Additionally, it includes materials to help GE-Free Farmers' Markets campaigns learn from the successes of others such as strategy considerations, sample market policy language, a graphic for a stall, and a sample press release.

# Campaign Strategy Considerations

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## Ideas for Campaigns

1. Enact a market policy requiring all vendors to be GE-free.
2. Establish a voluntary pledge and create a sign that vendors can display to inform their customers that they offer GE-free products.
3. Offer GE-free logos to vendors and markets that implement a GE-free policy or practices.

## Enforcement

For market managers, an early and important consideration will be the question of enforcement. Market managers are generally careful to not put themselves in the position to add work by guaranteeing or certifying the practices of their vendors. When vendors join a market, they are usually given a policy manual and required to sign a statement of agreement. While the bylaws of some markets may state that the market reserves the right to inspect farms, this probably never happens.

## Build Relationships with Farmers

Regardless of which focus your campaign takes, it will be important to involve vendors early in the campaign. They can be allies and advocates, particularly if you present the GE-free angle to them as a marketing strategy. In some cases, there may be farmers on the Board of the market. At the very least, they will have some kind of relationship with the market staff (sometimes not harmonious, though!), who will certainly have influence on policy decisions. Personal relationships will no doubt be important, either as obstacles or advantages. See if you can develop some trust and alliances with vendors to learn about the market politics and issues.

Remember that farmers selling at your market do not necessarily farm in your region — some drive for many hours to reach markets, especially lucrative and popular ones. Also, the people selling at the market may not necessarily be the farmers who grew the crop; they may be paid help or family members. Particularly in urban areas, consider the fact that you may face language barriers with some farmers and vendors.

## Target the Decision Makers

Be sure to consider who the decision makers are. In many cases, a Board of Directors is responsible for deciding on policy. The staff (e.g., market managers, executive directors), whether or not they have a formal vote on the Board, are also influential. Find out if/when Board meetings are held. Arrange for conversations with individual Board members. Take allied farmers with you to important meetings to be your messengers.

## Frame the Message

When trying to enact a policy, it is more likely to be successful if it is framed as a good business strategy. Since most consumers want their products labeled for GE content, and

a majority prefers not to consume GE foods (particularly fresh produce), the GE-free identity should provide a distinction to farmers and to markets that embrace it. This is particularly important in markets that are highly competitive, either in particular regions or amongst participating farmers. Farmers are usually looking for ways to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

One tool you might want to consider is a poll of customers regarding their preferences about consuming GMO food and labeling, either informally conducted or formally with the cooperation of the manager. This data could then be shared with both vendors and decision makers.

Keep in mind that the market as an entity also has financial interests to consider. They obtain stall fees from their vendors and a percentage of their sales. The better participating farmers do economically, the more money the market makes.

*Drawn from Californians for GE-Free Agriculture's Organizers Handbook, 2005*

# Examples of GE-Free Farmers' Market Policy Language

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## 1. Marin Certified Farmers' Market Association (MCFMA)

Bridget, Executive Director • [www.marincountyfarmersmarkets.org](http://www.marincountyfarmersmarkets.org) or 415-456-3276

The MCFMA is a member-based organization operating nine markets, with a member-elected Board. They passed a GE-free policy several years ago, and though they see this as a marketing advantage, they have not yet made it a major marketing focus.

*Products Prohibited at MCFMA:*

*Crops grown using Genetically Modified (GM) seed planted after March 1, 2000 may not be sold at the market. Consult MCFMA office for a current list of these crops, which include varieties of canola, soy, corn, tomato, radicchio, summer squash, potatoes, cotton and papaya. Note: since there are no labeling requirements for GM seeds, the only sure way to avoid growing crops using unlabelled GM seeds, is to give preference to certified organic agricultural products and processed foods.*

## 2. SF Ferry Plaza Farmers Market

Maggie Gosselin, Programs Manager • [maggie@cuesa.org](mailto:maggie@cuesa.org)

This market is operated by CUESA (Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture), and governed by the non-profit Board.

In policy manual: No crops grown using seed modified with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) may be sold at FPFM.

## 3. Berkeley Farmers Market

Ecology Center • [bfm@ecologycenter.org](mailto:bfm@ecologycenter.org)

On the agreements that farmers sign when becoming vendors, the following statement appears: *Genetically Modified Organisms Ban Agreement*

*I agree that no product or ingredient in any product that I sell at the Berkeley Farmers' Market will be grown from genetically modified seeds.*

## 4. Santa Barbara Farmers Market

Laurence Hauben, Executive Director

Tel: (805) 962-5354 • Cell: (805) 331-1218 • Email: [SBCFMA@rain.org](mailto:SBCFMA@rain.org)

This market is operated by a non-profit corporation, and the Board is comprised of nine farmers. They recently passed a GE-free policy stating that “*no transgenic foods would be sold at the markets*”, and they are currently updating their rules, so this new policy is not yet included in writing.

## 5. Hanalei Farmers' Market

John Parziale, farmer and organizer of GMO-free policy

Tel: (808) 651-6930

The farmers at this market recently passed a policy saying they will not “*knowingly grow, plant, or sell genetically engineered foods or seeds.*” Due to widespread contamination of papayas by the GMO papaya in Hawaii, farmers felt it was important to add the word “*knowingly*” to their resolution.

# A Farmer Pledge to Protect Farmers, Consumers, and the Environment from Genetically Engineered Crops

WHEREAS:

- There is growing evidence that farmers using genetic engineering (GE) technology are experiencing increased input costs and lower crop prices due to international marketplace rejection of GE crops;
- Consumers around the world are increasingly rejecting GE food, and many governments require GE product labeling in response to consumer concerns;
- Genetic contamination because of pollen drift and seed mixing affects farmers by: 1) threatening their ability to produce GE-free crops; 2) exposing them to unwanted legal vulnerabilities such as patent infringement; 3) contaminating organic and non-GE crops, causing market loss;
- GE technology leads to increased weed and pest resistance, requiring increased use of pesticides and herbicides;
- Seed patenting represents a loss of control for farmers on the means of agricultural production, and leads to a dependency on biotechnology corporations.

THEREFORE, as a farmer, I/we:

1. Pledge to not purchase, sell or plant any varieties of GE seeds or crops;
2. Demand a suspension of all further releases and governmental approvals of genetically engineered seeds and agricultural products;
3. Demand that biotechnology companies be held liable for any and all damages that result from the use of their genetically engineered crops;
4. Demand that farmers who reject genetic engineering should not bear the cost of establishing that their product is free of genetic engineering.

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Signature(s)

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Name(s)

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Farm/Company

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Address

City

State

Zip

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Phone

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Email

# Sample Fact Sheet for Farmers

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## Farmer Fact Sheet on Genetic Engineering

### What is Genetic Engineering?

Genetic engineering differs radically from traditional breeding techniques and can only occur in laboratories where scientists are able to transfer gene bacteria, viruses, plants, and even animals to common food crops to capture a desired trait. This process overcomes species barriers that traditional plant and animal breeders could never cross. Genetic engineers have already inserted human genes into rice, jellyfish, and chicken genes into potatoes, and they have developed foods using dozens of other combinations that would never occur in nature. The main crops currently on the market are GE corn, soy, canola, and cotton.

### The True Costs of Genetically Engineered Agriculture

Genetically engineered crops are not standing up to the promises made by the biotech industry. Midwestern, Canadian, and Argentinean farmers who have adopted this technology are experiencing increased input costs and lower crop prices as export market rejection increases - a deadly combination for family farmers.

In the U.S., economic studies revealed that farmers are not saving money with GE varieties and in fact, may end up losing money. Consider these facts:

- Dr. Charles Benbrook, former Director of the Agriculture Board of the National Academy of Sciences, found that Bt corn has cost U.S. farmers \$92 million in the last six years. Yield gains or pesticide reductions have not offset the increased costs associated with the GE seeds.
- Purdue University researchers found that the cost of Bt corn seed exceeds the value of the seed to farmers by more than \$11/acre. Studies of biotech soybeans also show no profits to farmers.
- An Iowa State economist looking at two planting seasons found that GE soybean farmers had no higher returns than non-GE growers did. Even the usually pro-biotech Farm Journal found in interviews with soy growers who planted GE soy fields that non-GE varieties outperformed GE soy by \$1.25/acre.

U.S. export markets are feeling the brunt of consumer rejection abroad. According to American Corn Growers Association, U.S. corn growers have lost \$814 million in the last five years due to the rejection of GE food by foreign markets.

### Consumer Rejection

Consumers throughout the world and increasingly in the U.S. are rejecting genetically engineered food. A PBS/Frontline April 2001 poll found that 65 percent of 21,000 respondents said we should not grow GE crops. An ABC News poll in June 2000 found 93 percent of respondents believe the government should require labeling of GE food, and 57 percent said they'd be less likely to buy GE-labeled foods. Public sentiment is overwhelmingly opposed to the genetic engineering of food in many major U.S. trading partners including the European Union, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Farmers in Canada and the Midwestern United States are

experiencing billions of dollars in losses of export markets because of this widespread marketplace rejection.

## **Farmer Liability**

*"Farmers are being sued for having GMOs on their property that they did not buy, do not want, will not use, and cannot sell," says North Dakota farmer, Tom Wiley. "If I contaminate my neighbor's property, I am held responsible. Farmers need legal protections to ensure that if the biotech industry contaminates their crops with GMOs, the industry is held responsible."*

The pollen from genetically engineered crops does not stay within the boundaries of a GE field, but can drift into neighboring fields. The results are unwanted environmental pollution and a legal nightmare for farmers.

The most well known case concerns Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian canola farmer who was sued by Monsanto after his fields were contaminated by the company's Roundup Ready canola. He unknowingly planted seeds that were genetically contaminated with the genes from Monsanto's RR canola. Monsanto sued Schmeiser for patent infringement, arguing that he owed the company its technology fee as their genes were now on his fields and in some of his seed. The judge found in favor of Monsanto, ruling that it did not matter how the contamination occurred or if the farmer was aware of the contamination. Schmeiser was ordered to pay Monsanto's technology fee, profits from his crop and Monsanto's lawyer fees, totaling more than 150,000 Canadian dollars. He took his case to the Canadian Supreme Court and lost. Percy Schmeiser is not alone. Monsanto has taken legal action against more than 400 U.S. and Canadian farmers for patent infringement.

## **Threats to Sustainable Farming**

Organic farmers in regions where GE crops are being grown are finding their fields are at risk of genetic contamination, putting their markets in jeopardy and burdening them with expensive DNA testing to prove their crops are GE-free. Organic farmers in Canada have filed a class action lawsuit against Monsanto and Bayer, formerly Aventis CropScience, claiming they can no longer grow organic canola because genetic contamination is so widespread. Organic farmers in Argentina filed a similar lawsuit.

## **Keeping Our Community GMO-Free**

Genetic engineering puts export markets in jeopardy, threatens organic and conventional farmers who want to provide a GMO-free product, and risks food safety with genetic pollution. A growing number of consumers in America are becoming concerned about genetically engineered foods, and want a source for non-GMO products. Local farmers still have the choice to go GMO-free and do not have to go down the unpredictable path of genetically engineered agriculture. One way to take a stand on this issue is to pledge to go GMO-free and to advertise your growing practices at the farmers' market, giving the residents of our community the choice to buy food free of genetic engineering.

**News Release**  
April 14, 2005

**Contact:** Joe Farmer, Safe Food Farm  
(808)xxx-xxxx  
Local Organizer, GMO-Free Kauai  
(808)xxx-xxxx

**Hanalei Becomes Home to Hawaii's First  
GMO-Free Farmer's Market**

*Citing consumer rejection, increased production cost, and legal vulnerabilities, local farmers pledge to sell only non-genetically engineered foods*

Today, the nineteen farmers who sell their crops at the weekly Hanalei Farmer's Market unanimously agreed to not knowingly plant or sell genetically engineered seeds or crops. The market became the first in the state to adopt an official policy forbidding the sale of genetically modified organisms.

"Not only have our customers told us they don't want to buy GMOs, but we also know these crops hurt farmers," says Joe Farmer of Safe Food Farm. "They make us vulnerable to lawsuits from the biotechnology companies, they contaminate neighboring crops, and they increase our input costs."

Farmer began circulating a petition among fellow vendors at the Hanalei market last month, in which farmers pledged not to knowingly grow GMOs and called for a suspension of further releases of GMOs into the environment on Kauai. The petition also demanded that biotechnology companies, rather than local farmers, be held liable for any damages that result from the use of their genetically engineered crops. After all the vendors signed on to the petition, they approached the market manager and advanced a policy for the market to be officially GMO-free.

Shoppers at the market applauded the decision. "As a mother," says Sally Mom of Princeville, "I'm very concerned about genetically engineered foods. These crops have never been proven safe for human consumption, and I don't want to feed GMOs to my kids. It's a comfort to know that the food we buy at the Hanalei Market will be GMO-free."

Other farmers' markets on the mainland have passed similar resolutions. In California alone, nine farmers' markets have pledged to be GMO-free. "We are proud to join farmers all over America who are saying no to GMOs and demanding the right to grow crops that are free of genetic contamination," says Jan Kalo, a taro grower from Hanalei. "This policy is one more step in Hawaiian farmers' efforts to stop genetic engineering in local agriculture."

Last year, the Hawaii Coffee Growers' Association passed a unanimous resolution calling on the Department of Agriculture to stop issuing permits for genetically engineered coffee to be tested in open field trials in the islands. In January of this year, Maui Land & Pine passed a policy pledging not to grow GMOs on their agricultural lands, citing consumer opposition to genetically engineered crops. And in March, Native Hawaiian activists secured an agreement from the University of Hawaii to stop research and development of genetically engineered Hawaiian taro.

"While the University and the state government continue to promote biotechnology, it is becoming clearer and clearer that the people and farmers of Hawaii want GMO-free, locally-based agriculture," says Noli Hoye of GMO-Free Kauai. "We are thrilled that the Hanalei farmers took this step, and hope that other farmers on the island and across the state will be inspired to pass similar market policies."

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*Please note this is a sample, not an actual release*

*(See [www.geaction.org](http://www.geaction.org) to download a pdf attachment to Chapter 8, GE-Free Graphic for Stall and Literature for Consumers)*