

IMPORTING Non-GMO Products

Despite its reputation as a leader in genetic modification, the United States is home to many providers of quality non-GMO products.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

First introduced to U.S. agriculture in the 1990s, genetically modified varieties of crops (also called GM or GMO for “genetically modified organisms”) — especially corn and soybeans — have become ubiquitous in America and throughout the world. As educated consumers demand non-GMO products for health and environmental reasons, the market for these products continues to expand.

“The most demand for non-GMO food comes from the European Union, Japan and Korea,” says Sue Bisco, director of certification and administration for Northland Organic Foods Corp., Winona, Minnesota. “The primary reason for this is consumer demand. Consumers in those countries and elsewhere are not convinced about the safety of GM foods environmentally and health-wise. They are also adamant about their right to choose GM foods or not and demand labeling GM foods so they can make educated decisions at the grocery store.”

Blandine Berthelot, European marketing representative for the Winona branch of Northland, agrees. “Europeans feel very strongly that they have a right to know what is in their food and make the decision to buy it or not, and they favor the current labeling of GMO foods.” She adds, “Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand have also put in place labeling requirements. Demand for non-GMO food has increased along with consumer awareness, while at the same time there has been dramatic expansion of the acreage of GMO crops in the United States, Argentina, Brazil and Canada, which makes sourcing non-GMOs more difficult.”

As some countries have strict standards for non-GMO labeling, finding an exporter who will work with you to ensure its prod-



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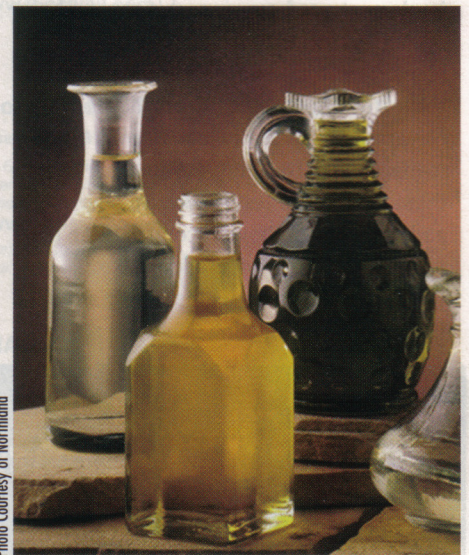


Photo Courtesy of Northland

ucts meet the necessary requirements is a top priority. Many U.S. suppliers have programs in place to guarantee that during each step of the process, from beginning to end, the product remains free from contamination.

“We have an identity-preserved program with which GMO testing is included as part of our normal quality-control procedures,” explains Jennifer Tesch, marketing director, SK Food International, a Fargo, North Dakota, supplier of non-GMO products including dry beans, grains, soybeans, cocoa products, flours and oils. “We perform both internal and third-party GMO testing to be certain that product is in compliance with approved specifications,” says Tesch. “We have complete traceability of each lot to our farmer’s field.”

Bisco says, “Northland has in place strict identity-preservation protocols, which we require our farmers, suppliers, processors

and storage facilities to follow. Besides the protocols, we test our products in-house throughout several stages of growing, harvesting and processing. Our products are also third-party tested by SGS certification agency [based in Geneva, Switzerland]. We have complete accountability and are able to trace products to the farm field they came from.”

For testing and implementing programs that ensure a paper trail for each product, many exporters, as well as importers, turn to companies like Eurofins GeneScan, based in Metairie, Louisiana.

Meeting The Challenge

Carlos Navarro, manager for identity preservation in North America for Eurofins GeneScan, works with suppliers and buyers to meet the challenges involved in exporting non-GMO products.

“We are the market-share leader in GMO