

Appendix 6: Consumer Rejection Tipping Point Against GMOs

GMOs are in serious trouble as the US market nears the tipping point of rejection. Consumer reaction to GMOs in Europe demonstrates the dynamics of a non-GMO tipping point and how rapidly it can occur.

Europe Achieved Tipping Point

On February 16, 1999, the gag order on GMO researcher Arpad Pusztai, PhD, was lifted when the UK Parliament invited him to testify. Once he exposed how the pro-GMO government and Royal Society tried to cover up data that showed how the process of genetic engineering causes serious health dangers, a firestorm of press coverage followed. Over 700 articles on GMOs were published in the UK alone in a single month. A columnist in *New Statesman* wrote, “The GM controversy has divided society into two warring blocs. All those who see genetically modified food as a scary prospect—‘Frankenstein foods’—are pitted against the defenders.”¹

On April 27, 1999, [Unilever announced](#) it would no longer use GMOs in its European brands. The next day, Nestle’s followed.² Others followed rapidly after that. Use of GMOs had become a marketing liability due to consumer concern—primarily based on health issues.

United States Accelerates Towards Tipping Point

Concern about health issues of GMOs jumped in the US from 51% in 2012 to 61% in 2013, according to [Natural Marketing Institute’s](#) 2013/2012 LOHAS Consumer Trends Database.³

A 2013 [New York Times survey](#) concurred, indicating “Three-quarters of Americans expressed concern about genetically modified organisms in their food, with most of them worried about the effects on people’s health.”⁴

In 2014, the [Hartman Group’s](#) survey revealed that 40% of Americans now say they are avoiding or reducing GMOs. The major reason for avoidance of GMOs was health concerns (70%). In 2007, about 15% of surveyed Americans said they were avoiding or reducing GMOs.⁵

To put the current 40% Hartman Group figure into perspective, [in 2007](#), 38% of consumers said they avoided or reduced growth hormones, and 41% said they avoided or reduced high fructose corn syrup (HFCS).⁶ The next year, Walmart announced that its milk was no longer from cows treated with rBGH and other food companies started replacing HFCS with sugar.

Over 31,000 products have been verified by the US-based [Non-GMO Project](#), and many others self-verify their own non-GMO claim.⁷

There is general agreement that a tipping point against GMOs occurred in the Natural Products industry in 2013. It was accelerated when the president of [Whole Foods stated in March 2013](#) that after products become Non-GMO Project verified, they achieve an increase of sales by 15 to 30%.⁸ Shortly after, thousands of products were enrolled in the verification program.

The beginning of 2014 saw [several major brands](#) introduce non-GMO claims: Cheerios, Grape Nuts, Ben & Jerry’s, Smart Balance Buttery Spread, I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter, and Similac infant formula.⁹ Chipotle Mexican food restaurant chain also declared itself non-GMO; their sales and popularity are increasing while traditional fast food chains are suffering.

According to [a spokesperson at Hain Celestial](#), there’s now a new wave of conventional retailers demanding natural, organic, and most especially, non-GMO foods.¹⁰

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As evidence mounts linking GMOs to health problems, thousands of US physicians are now advising their patients to avoid eating. GMO concerns are spreading among mothers, who do a great deal of the food shopping.

If non-GMO products in mainstream supermarkets begin to steal market share from their competitors due to the claim, the rest of the industry will realize they can't afford to wait until their competitors make the non-GMO claim and steal their customers as well. A tipping point will be achieved.

¹ Ziauddin Sardar, "Loss of Innocence: Genetically Modified Food," *New Statesman* (UK), vol. 129, no. 4425, February 26, 1999, p. 47

² Ethical Investing, "World's Largest Food Production Companies Phase Out Genetically Engineered Foods," April 28, 1999. <http://www.ethicalinvesting.com/monsanto/news/10044.htm>

³ Natural Marketing Institute, "GMOs, the Right to Know," 2013. <http://nmiolutions.com/index.php/about-nmi/news-a-publications/nmi-trend-insights/119-gmos-the-right-to-know>

⁴ *The New York Times*, (2013) "Strong Support for Labeling Modified Foods," (Jul). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/28/science/strong-support-for-labeling-modified-foods.html>

⁵ The Hartman Group (2013). Hartbeat Newsletter (Jun). <http://hartbeat.hartman-group.com/acumenPdfs/consumer-side-of-gmos-2015-01-15.pdf>

⁶ The Hartman Group (2014). Hartbeat Newsletter (Jun). <http://hartbeat.hartman-group.com/article/528/GMO-Labeling-Confusion-at-the-Shelf>

⁷ Non-GMO Project website (2015) "Does the USDA really have a new non-GMO program?" <http://www.nongmoproject.org/2015/05/14/does-the-usda-really-have-a-new-non-gmo-program/>

⁸ *USA Today* (2013), "Whole Foods to label genetically modified products," (March). <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/03/08/whole-foods-genetically-modified-label/1974329/>

⁹ Mercola.com (2014) "Cheerios go non-GMO," (Jan). <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/01/18/gmo-free-cheerios.aspx>

¹⁰ Food Navigator (2015) "Second wave of conventional retailers now demanding natural, organic, non-GMO, says Hain Celestial," (May). <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Manufacturers/New-wave-of-conventional-retailers-wants-natural-organic-non-GMO>