



Tops Markets, Inc. 6363 Main Street, Williamsville, New York 14221-5898 (716) 635-5000

February 19, 2001

Ms. Amy Buringrud
PO Box 65
Otis, OR 97368

Dear Mrs. Buringrud:

Thank you for taking the time to contact our President and CEO, Mr. Frank Curci, regarding foods produced using biotechnology. Mr. Curci forwarded your letter to me and asked that I address your concerns.

Biotechnology, or genetic engineering, is not only one of the most active areas of science, but is also an issue of public debate in many parts of the world. Advocates of biotechnology in agriculture hope to reduce the use of environmentally harmful and expensive chemicals by imparting crop protection abilities in the genetic makeup of the plants. Critics are concerned about the uncertainties in human and ecological health.

Tops Markets, Inc. has no objections to the responsible use of safe biotechnology where there are demonstrable benefits for consumers. All food products, including those made with the help of biotechnology, must have approval by regulatory authorities, based on their safety and environmental impact. In the United States, the **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** and the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** have this responsibility.

Tops supports the role and responsibility of the FDA to determine appropriate food labeling, and we support the FDA's labeling policy: that appropriate labels should be required if genetic engineering significantly changes the structural, functional or nutritional makeup of food. Since there is currently no FDA or other agreed definition of genetically modified products on which to base labeling, Tops additionally believes it would be beneficial for the FDA to set guidelines for differentiating genetically modified from non-genetically modified foods.

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A wide range of foods contains genetically modified ingredients, because **a significant proportion** of the soy, canola and cotton grown in the United States are genetically modified. Farmers have used some methods of genetic modification, such as hybridization for thousands of years to obtain specific traits in their crops. Nearly every tomato, ear of corn and even chicken or turkey that is produced today is a result of some form of genetic modification. Therefore, products made in the U.S. from these ingredients are likely to contain genetically modified ingredients, unless they are certified organic.

If you wish to avoid genetically modified foods, the best alternative is to buy certified organic foods until guidelines are in place to label all foods that have been altered. Tops Markets offers a wide range of **certified organic products** in our stores. All of our organic items, from produce to canned goods, to frozen foods are **clearly labeled**, and highlighted by bright green shelving and signage.

The federal regulations being developed for organic foods, we anticipate, will not include the use of genetically modified foods or ingredients. It is our understanding that the organic foods industry also supports this position, so even now you probably can rely on a certified organic food having little or no genetically modified ingredients.

Finally, we urge the biotech industry and food manufacturers to focus more on developing genetically modified products with clear advantages for consumers in terms of price, quality, health and sustainability. Tops also encourages the EPA and FDA to maintain an active science-based monitoring program to ensure that only safe and wholesome products reach the market.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact us. We appreciate hearing your concerns and look forward to serving you well into the new millennium.

Sincerely,


Brian LaValley
Community Relations Manager