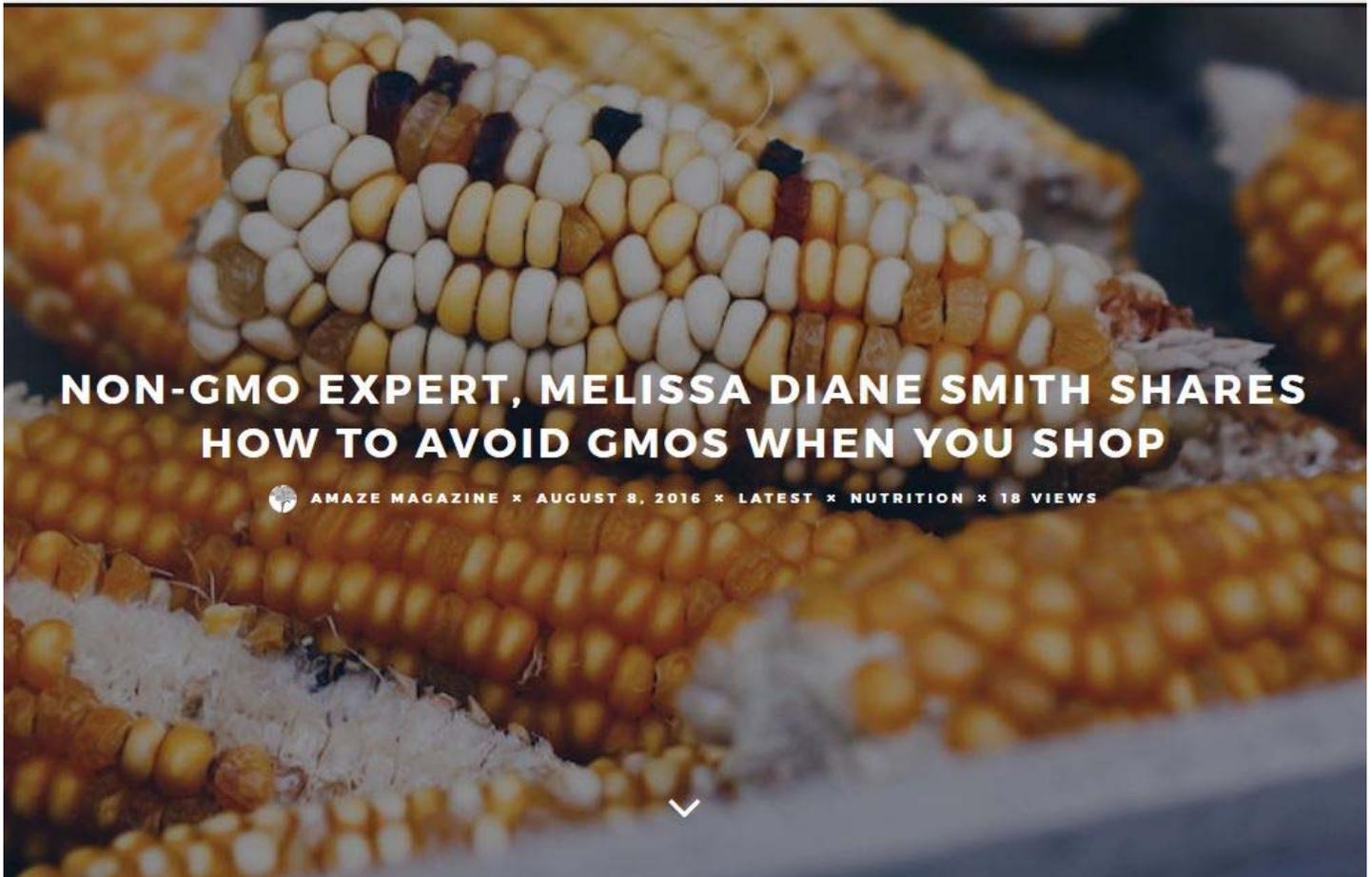


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On Friday, July 29th, President Barack Obama signed into law a bill that allows food companies and producers to use QR codes, 1-800 numbers, or on-package text or symbols to label food products that contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Nearly 300 consumer, health, farmer, and environmental organizations and food companies representing hundreds of thousands of Americans urged President Obama to veto the bill because it does not provide the mandatory, on-package text labeling that nine out of ten Americans want and that citizens from 64 other countries already have.

Melissa Diane Smith, health journalist, holistic nutrition expert, and the author of *Going Against GMOs: The Fast-Growing Movement to Avoid Unnatural Genetically Modified "Foods" to Take Back Our Food and Health*, offers insights on the controversial issues surrounding GMOs, the new law, and how people can learn to avoid GMOs when they shop.

What are GMOs and why are they important?

GMOs are genetically modified organisms, also known as genetically modified foods. GMOs look the same as foods grown naturally, but they are created in a laboratory and very different on the inside: They're most often genetically engineered to be herbicide tolerant or to produce their own internal insecticide. GMOs were introduced in 1996 and are widely used in our food supply now, but most people don't know they've been eating them because GMOs haven't been labeled.

The FDA has not conducted safety studies on GM foods. Instead, it leaves determining their safety up to the companies that make them. Animal research points to the potential for significant health risks from eating GM foods, and there are environmental, farmer's rights, and food security concerns associated with them as well. More than three dozen countries in the world have banned the cultivation of GM crops. Concerns about the risks posed by GMOs have created a growing movement of people in this country who want to avoid eating them.

Will the new law make it easier for consumers who want to avoid GMOs when they shop?

You would think so, but for the most part, no, it won't. The goal of the act was to establish a uniform national standard for disclosure of GM food ingredients, but

the law doesn't accomplish that goal. There are so many problems and loopholes with the law that it has often been called the Denying Americans the Right to Know (or DARK) Act. The law replaces clearly worded state laws with what the Center for Food Safety calls "a vague multi-year bureaucratic process specifically designed to provide less transparency to consumers."

The law overturns Vermont's recently enacted GMO labeling law that required on-package labeling with the words "partially produced with genetic engineering." Many national companies, such as Campbell Soup, Mars, PepsiCo, Nestle, and General Mills, were already starting to label their products nationwide to comply with the Vermont law. But the new law overrides Vermont's law and other state laws, and gives companies other disclosure options they can use that aren't instantly understood by consumers.

If a company decides to label a product with a QR (Quick Response) code that is only readable with a smart phone, people who don't have a smart phone won't be able to scan products to get the information about GMOs they want. According to Pew Research Center, only 50% of people with low incomes in the U.S. own a smartphone; only 52% of rural Americans own a smartphone; and only 27% of seniors own a smartphone. Even those who do own smartphones are not guaranteed consistent access to the Internet. Consumer groups and activists such as Rev. Jesse Jackson have spoken out about how the law discriminates against low-income, rural, minority, and elderly populations.

Is there any way that GMOs can be avoided easily? What are the most common foods that contain GMOs?

It's not easy to do at first, but, yes, GMOs can be identified and avoided even without mandatory labeling. In fact, a growing movement of people have been doing that the past several years, and many companies now realize that selling and voluntarily labeling products that don't contain GMOs boosts sales of those products and gives those companies a competitive edge. So, labeling has gradually been occurring on a voluntary basis because of increased consumer demand.

To avoid GMOs, shoppers need to learn that there are 11 primary at-risk GM foods commonly found in grocery stores, and they can remember those foods as 3 Cs, 2 Ss, 2 As, 2 Ps, a Y and a Z. Those foods are:

- Corn(as in corn oil, cornmeal, cornstarch, corn syrup, hominy, polenta, and other corn-based ingredients)
- Canola(as in canola oil)
- Cottonseed(as in cottonseed oil)
- Sugar Beets(as in "sugar" in an ingredient, which is almost certainly a combination of sugar from both sugar cane and GM sugar beets)
- Soybeans(as in soybean oil, soy protein, soy lecithin, soy milk, tofu, and other soy-based ingredients)
- Alfalfa,which is fed to livestock
- Apple,which will be arriving in some stores this year
- Papaya (from Hawaii and China)
- Potatoes,which were sold in 10 states last year and will be sold in a larger number this year
- Yellow Squash and Zucchini

Consumers can avoid the genetically modified foods entirely or choose those foods only when they are labeled USDA Organic or Non-GMO Project Verified. Avoiding processed convenience foods goes a long way in helping you avoid the most common GMOs.

What's the difference between USDA Organic and Non-GMO Project Verified foods?

Products that carry the Non-GMO Project Verified label are independently verified to be in compliance with North America's only third party standard for GMO avoidance, including testing of at-risk ingredients.

Products that have the USDA Organic seal cannot contain any GMO ingredients. They also must be produced without irradiation, sewage sludge, antibiotics, growth hormones, and synthetic chemical fertilizers. However, some GM crops such as corn can spread through wind drift and contaminate organic crops, and organic certification does not require testing for GMOs. So, for the most protection against GMOs, choose products with both the Non-GMO Project Verified label and the USDA Organic label—or just avoid foods made with the 11 direct sources of GMOs.

What else is important to know about how to avoid GMOs?

In addition to the direct sources of GMOs, there are also indirect sources of GMOs that can be avoided. Conventional meat, eggs, and dairy products are often raised on feed that contains GMOs. The best way to avoid these is to switch to eating organically raised beef and chicken, wild-caught fish, and organic eggs. Look for

meat clearly labeled as organic, and preferably organic and 100% grass-fed. Or look for fish, poultry, eggs, and meat labeled as Non-GMO Project Verified.

“Shopping non-GMO requires some effort and learning,” Ms. Smith says. “GMOs are everywhere—people will be surprised and amazed to find out that they are in virtually all stores and all restaurants, and have made it into most of the foods that most of us eat. It does take time to change longstanding habits, but the more we avoid GMOs, the better we get at it, and the more second nature it becomes. If you want to avoid GMOs, don’t hesitate to start somewhere—even if it’s just eating one non-GMO or organic meal a day.”

MELISSA DIANE SMITH is a health journalist, holistic nutrition expert, and health educator. She has a degree in Journalism from the University of Arizona and has been a holistic nutrition counselor in private practice for over 20 years. She has written several books on foods and health including **Going Against the Grain: How Reducing and Avoiding Grains Can Revitalize Your Health** and the companion guide **Gluten Free Throughout the Year**. She also is the author of **User’s Guide to Preventing and Reversing Diabetes Naturally** and the coauthor of **Syndrome X: The Complete Nutritional Program to Prevent and Reverse Insulin Resistance**. Many of her books have been translated and are available in other languages (Spanish, Korean and Indonesian). She lives in Tucson, Arizona. Additional information is available at www.MelissaDianeSmith.com.