

A **genetically modified organism (GMO)** is an [organism](#) whose [genetic](#) material has been altered using [genetic engineering](#) techniques. These techniques use DNA [molecules](#) from different sources, which are combined into one molecule to create a new set of [genes](#). This DNA is then transferred into an organism, giving it modified or novel genes. GMOs are the constituents of [genetically modified foods](#). (Source: Wikipedia) According to some sources, at least one GMO ingredient is found in 90% of packaged food products in US grocery stores; this number is unclear because GMO-containing foods do not require labeling.

**Why is this a problem?** Although many scientists believe that GMOs present no obvious or as yet detected **health risks**, the long term impact of GMOs has not been assessed. Although no health risks have been conclusively demonstrated, the longer term effects are simply unknown. Tobacco in cigarettes was thought to be safe for several decades before the lung cancer connection was confirmed. In addition, there is a possibility that introducing new genetic structures into plants may create a new [allergen](#) or cause an allergic reaction in susceptible individuals. **Labeling and extensive testing of GM foods** should be required to avoid the possibility of harm to consumers. In Europe, [GMO labeling laws](#) have been in effect since 1997 and were updated in 2004 to include all food products that utilize GMOs during any point in their production. GMO crops have been rejected by consumers in Europe, possibly due to balanced media coverage of the including health issues. In Europe, more than 4,500 councils and local governments have declared themselves GMO free. Peru recently declared a 10-year ban on genetically modified foods.

Even more concerning, perhaps because more is known, are the potential **environmental risks**. These risks include [unintended harm to other organisms](#). For example, pest-resistant toxins in GM corn kill many species of insect larvae indiscriminately; it may not be possible to design a toxin that would only kill crop-damaging pests and remain harmless to all other insects. The potential risk of harm to non-target organisms needs to be evaluated further. [Reduced effectiveness of pesticides](#) is another potential issue. Will insects become resistant to crops that have been genetically-modified to produce their own pesticides? Another concern is that crop plants engineered for herbicide tolerance and weeds will cross-breed, resulting in the [transfer of the herbicide resistance genes from the crops into the weeds](#). These "superweeds" would then be herbicide tolerant as well.

**Government oversight of GMOs is missing in action.** The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has not required safety studies or labeling of GMOs. For those consumers who would like to understand what is in their food and control the contents of their pantries, kitchen, and bodies, it is impossible to do so in today's completely opaque GM environment.

**Hartford Food System** has focused on ensuring healthy food access for Hartford's residents since 1978. Through our organic urban farming activities in our Grow Hartford program, we work to ensure that more of our community can express healthy food the way nature intended it. We strongly support a "level playing field" that provides consumers with the information they need to make good food decisions. Labeling and testing GMO containing foods is one important way to do that. Thank you.