



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Karen Ross, Secretary

May 3, 2017

Notice to Industry Stakeholders:

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's State Organic Program (SOP) is committed to upholding the integrity of products produced or sold in California as organic. As a valuable member of the organic industry, you are being provided with this informational letter to assist us in our efforts.

In 2015 the California Organic Products Advisory Committee (COPAC) asked the SOP to begin gathering information on the potential presence of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in organic products. Because the survey was informational, the products were obtained using a "blind" methodology that allowed samples to be collected and tested without knowledge of the actual product's origin.

A total of 23 samples were submitted for testing between April-December 2016. The samples tested consisted of fresh vegetables, animal feed, and cottonseed. Of the 23 samples, seven showed the presence of GMOs used in animal feed – alfalfa, soy, corn, and cottonseed. Two of those seven were found to be comprised of 100 percent GMOs. One sample was chicken feed pellets that contained soy as the primary ingredient base, and the other was cottonseed.

The National Organic Program (NOP) prohibits the use of GMOs in organic production and handling. The USDA organic regulations prohibit the use of GMOs as "excluded methods" under 7 CFR § 205.105. However, the presence of GMOs alone, just like the mere presence of pesticides, may not constitute a violation of NOP regulations.

The SOP has completed the initial phase of the original survey. Given the two 100 percent GMO test results, the SOP will continue surveilling the presence of GMOs in organic products to uphold organic integrity. Moving forward, the SOP's sampling process will no longer be "blind." Positive GMO test results of certified organic products will result in notification to the certifier for further investigation and appropriate action. Per NOP Policy Memo 11-13, certifying agents will be responsible for working with organic producers to identify the source of the GMOs and to implement improvements to avoid contact with GMOs in the future. The SOP will work in collaboration with the certifiers and COPAC on identifying steps for future surveillance and enforcement actions.

If you have further questions, please contact the SOP at (916) 900-5030.

Sincerely,

Danny Lee, Supervising Special Investigator
California State Organic Program

cc: Miles V. McEvoy, Deputy Administrator, National Organic Program
Jenna Areias, Supervising Environmental Scientist, California Feed and Livestock Drug Inspection Program

Attachment – CDFA Organic GMO Pilot Survey

