

Cheerio to GMOs in Cheerios

As anti-GMO activist groups celebrated, General Mills announced that it has removed genetically modified ingredients from its iconic original brand.

While the oats used to make Cheerios have never contained any GMOs, the company agreed under threats of a boycott to dump GM beet sugar and replace it with non-GMO pure cane sugar. The substitution will result in no health benefits but will incur slightly higher production costs, which may be passed along to the consumer or absorbed by General Mills.

“We use just a small amount of corn starch in cooking, and just one gram of sugar per serving for taste.” the company writes on its website. “So we were able to change how we source and handle ingredients to ensure that the corn starch for original Cheerios comes only from non-GMO corn, and our sugar is only non-GMO pure cane sugar.”

General Mills says it has no plans to phase out GM ingredients from its other cereals in the US, even though most Cheerios varieties sold in Europe are made without GMOs. “For our other (non-organic) cereals, the widespread use of GM seed in crops such as corn, soy, or beet sugar would make reliably moving to non-GM ingredients difficult, if not impossible,” says the company, in a statement.

The move was hailed by anti-GMO food activists, who have been formally campaigning for this change since November 2012 when GMO Inside, an anti-technology arm of [Green America](#), launched its public effort. Cheerios was targeted, in part, because it’s one of the first foods given to many toddlers.

As soon as the campaign launched, tens of thousands of consumers started flooding Cheerios’ Facebook page with concerned comments regarding GMOs in Cheerios, and used an app put out by Cheerios to [spell out anti-GMO messages](#) in the Cheerios font. GMO Inside also put out a [video](#) highlighting the GMOs in Cheerios that was watched by over 200,000 viewers.

“This is a big deal,” says Todd Larsen, corporate responsibility director at Green America, a green economy activist group. “Cheerios is an iconic brand and one of the leading breakfast cereals in the US.” What’s more, he adds, “We don’t know of any other example of such a major brand of packaged food, eaten by so many Americans, going from being GMO to non-GMO.”

Rodale, the organic products and publishing empire, called the announcement “shockingly refreshing,”

General Mills spent millions of dollars to defeat GMO labeling laws in California and Washington state. GM is the largest packaged food company in the US and Cheerios, its flagship brand, is the fourth best-selling cereal, with \$364 million in sales last year, according to the market researcher IRI Worldwide. General Mills’ Honey Nut Cheerios, which will not be GMO-free, is the bestselling cereal in America, with sales topping \$556 million.