

## In conflict with GMO farmers, do organic farmers seek special treatment

March 3, 2014 story from *Reuters* by Carey Gillam presents claims by organic farmers that the federal government needs to step in to prevent “contamination” of their fields. So what is the problem that has organic growers hunting for help?

According to the press release uncritically recycled by *Reuters*, “Growing crops free from contamination by genetically modified crops and the pesticides used on those biotech versions is getting more difficult and more costly for U.S. farmers, and new government rules to control contamination are needed, according to [sic] report... by an environmental organization and an organic food group.”

The first problem with the story is the use of the term “contamination.” What does it mean to “contaminate” something? According to Merriam-Webster, to “contaminate” means “to make something dangerous, dirty, or impure by adding something harmful or undesirable to it.” So is it the right word to use in this context?

Farming is not a sterile endeavor. Farmers literally work in the dirt, and try as they might, it can be a very messy business. Harvests invariably reflect this truth, and nobody who’s ever spent any time on a farm would be surprised to find a bean amongst the corn kernels, or low levels of field corn in sweet corn seed. The term of art for this is “adventitious presence” or AP. We don’t talk about it as contamination because it is not harmful, and it’s completely unsurprising. So the question arises – what “harm” is caused by the presence of material improved through biotechnology in an organic farmer’s fields or harvests? The answer is straightforward – none. That’s right, zero harm, because there is no hazard.

**Read the full original article:** [Organic Farm Supporters Seek Special Treatment](#)