

Just Label It!: Pro-organic lobby group masquerading as charitable food information resource?

The **Just Label It Campaign** (JLIT), founded in 2012 by “Organic Voices” (an organic industry coalition which also goes by “Only Organic” and “The Organic Voices Action Fund”) in coop



housed at the Environmental Working Group in Washington, DC. In interviews the

group's listed “chairman” Stonyfield Organic founder Gary Hirshberg said the organization would work in coordination with the Organic Trade Association (OTA) whose executive director, Karen Batcha, is a founding board member of Organic Voices.[\[1\]](#)

According to their website, donations to the group are NOT tax deductible; however, state government business filings shows the group claims to be a 501c3 tax exempt organization (see funding section below). The group, however, operates both the Organic Voices trade association group and Just Label It campaigns out of same offices as the non-profit Environmental Working Group at 1436 U St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

EWG vice president Scott Faber who serves as Organic Voices executive director told a North Carolina Biotechnology conference hosted by North Carolina State University in November 2014 that the Just Label It campaign was an EWG hosted project. EWG's latest available tax filings (2012) make no related disclosures about this industry funded marketing-related campaign relationship.

HISTORY

Just Label It! is a registered trademark (first claimed use October 2011) of the Organic Voices Action Fund [\[2\]](#) registered by Washington, DC lawyer Karen A. Post with Trister, Ross, Schadler & Gold—a firm which specializes in non-profit tax, campaign finance and government lobbying issues.[\[3\]](#)

Organic Voices which runs and owns Just Label It, formed the Organic Voices Action Fund initially as a [non-profit 501c4](#) (Civic leagues or organizations not organized for profit but operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare—not a industry trade association or lobbying group) domestic corporation in New Hampshire February 7, 2014. (Note: a search of the IRS exempt organization database shows no registration for Organic Voices.[4]) The filing documents were signed by Laura Batcha (Organic Trade Association), Nancy Hirshberg (Stonyfield Organic CEO Gary Hirshberg's wife), Ken Cook (Environmental Working Group), Melissa Hughes (General Counsel for Organic Valley), and Joan Boykin (then director of The Organic Center, currently VP for marketing with Way Better Snacks).

The object purpose of the organization was listed as “To advocate for the rights of Americans to safe and health food and farming... This corporation is organized exclusively as a social wel



with the mailing address PO Box 5523, Manchester, NH 03108-5523.” In 2013 the

documents were amended to note Scott Faber (Environmental Working Group) as Executive Director as of meetings held by the board of directors on 2/20/2013 and 5/8/2013 at which the articles were amended to state the organization would be a [501c3 tax-exempt organization](#) (an organization which must not be organized or operated for the benefit of any private or commercial interests) and changed the name to “Organic Voices.” [5]

Just Label It uses the mailing address of Environmental Working Group, but also uses:

- PO Box 11390, Washington, DC 2008.[6]
- PO Box 5523, Manchester NH 03108.[7] (The mailing address for the Organic Voices Action Fund.)

While proclaiming to be a charitable organization with 2013 business filings stating they are a 501c3 tax exempt organization, Organic Voices' Just Label It campaign has been promoted by industry trade publications quoting Gary Hirshberg and other organic industry executives as running advertising campaigns whose goal is an industry funded initiative to “sell organic to the masses” tied in with the Environmental Working Group's non-profit activities such as publishing the “Dirty Dozen” and “Clean 15” lists. They note they will use advertising, social media and political lobbying to get organizations to demand GMO-free organic foods and convert consumers to organic purchasing.[8]

CAMPAIGNS / ACTIVITIES

Fenton Communications, infamous for their role in the Alar in Apples causes cancer scare[9], provides the PR support to Organic Voices and the Just Label It campaign.[10] Redwood Interactive claims to be working on the Organic Voices “Only Organic” campaign, under the direction of “A group of USDA

Organic-approved companies seeking to maximize the reach” of their marketing efforts to spread the work about the the differences of organic foods.[\[11\]](#) They are also using the Humanaut “brand invention” digital advertising agency.[\[12\]](#)

KEY PEOPLE

- Gary Hirshberg, CEO Stonyfield Organic, chairman
- Laura Batcha (Organic Trade Association) founding board member
- Nancy Hirshberg (Stonyfield Organic CEO Gary Hirshberg’s wife) founding board member
- Ken Cook (Environmental Working Group) founding board member
- Melissa Hughes (General Counsel for Organic Valley, board member with EWG and Non-GMO Project) founding board member
- Joan Boykin (then director of The Organic Center, currently VP for marketing with Way Better Snacks), founding board member
- Mike Ferry, Horizon Organic/Silk White Wave, board member
- Sarah Bird, Annie’s Organic Inc, board member
- Robynn Shrader, National Cooperative Grocers Association, board member
- Robyn O’Brien, Allergy Kids Foundation, board member

Staff:

- Scott Faber, executive director (Environmental Working Group SVP)
- Katrina Staves, campaign manager (also registrant for only-organic.org who previously worked as a campaign fundraiser with BenchmarkStrategies.org on democratic senate race in North Carolina).[\[13\]](#)
- Violet Batcha (daughter of OTA’s Laura Batcha), Social media and communications manager for Organic Voices and Just Label It (former account coordinator for Fenton Communications and communications intern with OTA)[\[14\]](#)

Lobbyists:

- Federal lobbyists Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen Bingel & Thomas were engaged by Just Label It according to Politico (December 11, 2014) “The registration lists “support [a](#) legal petition to the FDA calling for the mandatory labeling of GE foods” as the lobbying issue. The firm’s Kelly Bingel, David Castagnetti, Bruce Mehlman, Dean Rosen, David Thomas, Elise Pickering, Charles Wooters, Susan Zook, Sohini Gupta and Sage Eastman will be lobbying on behalf of Just Label It.”

FUNDING SOURCES

The Just Label It campaign is hosted on the same servers as the Organic Voices industry campaign website “Only Organic.”[\[15\]](#) and notes “initial funding” for the campaign from various organic industry sponsoring partners including: Organic Valley, Stonyfield Organic, Lundberg Farms, Horizon Organic, Honest Tea, Clif Bar, Aurora Organic Dairy, Amy’s Kitchen, Annie’s Homegrown Organic, Dr. Bronner’s

and Bardmer Foods. Donations are solicited, but specifically noted as NOT tax deductible. The Just Label It ‘terms of use’ specifically states the website is an “Organic Voices’ web property.”

While not a non-profit, the Organic Voices campaign has been promoted as a “non-profit or community organization” by Just Label It outreach manager [Katey Parker\] in promoting the early campaign website](#) listed at the Environmental Working Group offices with government ID# 45-4471572 (note: this is not a registered government tax id).[\[16\]](#)

Several organic industry companies have engaged in product and campaign promotions for customers to the support Just Label It campaign such as White Wave Food, organic brand “Silk” soy milk which offered donations for customers who “like” the Just Label It Facebook campaign site.[\[17\]](#)

AFFILIATIONS

- Environmental Working Group
- Organic Voices
- Organic Trade Association (linked with the “[Organic It’s Worth It](#)” campaign)
- Center for Food Safety – reported that attorney for the Center for Food Safety prepared Organic Voices’ Just Label It campaign petitions and ballot measures.[\[18\]](#)

Resources

- [Just Label It Campaign Facebook page](#)
- [Just Label It Campaign on Twitter](#)

References

- 1 [Environmental Working Group and Organic Voices form GMO labeling Coalition](#), by Hank Shultz, Food Navigator USA, March 6, 2014.
- 2 <http://trademarks.justia.com/862/47/just-label-86247903.html>
- 3 <http://tristerross.com/about.html>
- 4 <http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Exempt-Organizations-Select-Check>
- 5 <https://www.sos.nh.gov/corporate/soskb/Corp.asp?1144335>
- 6 http://www.change.org/organizations/just_label_it
- 7 <http://justlabelit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Revised-Petitionv2.pdf>
- 8 [New Ad Campaign Aims to Sell Organic to the Masses](#), by Emily Main, Rodale News, March 6, 2013.
- 9 [HOW A PR FIRM EXECUTED THE ALAR SCARE](#), Wall Street Journal, October 3, 1989.
- 10 http://www.fenton.com/studio_works/organic-voices/
- 11 <http://redwood-inc.com/portfolio/usda-organic/>
- 12 <http://humanaut.is/projects/organic-voices/>
- 13 <https://www.scribd.com/doc/236740862/Meet-and-Greet>

- 14 <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/violet-batcha/42/640/829>
- 15 <https://reverseip.domaintools.com/search/?q=onlyorganic.org>
- 16 http://www.idealist.org/view/nonprofit/z2J4jsTSS2fP/?people_view=employees&people_page=1
- 17 <http://silk.com/Just-Label-It-Promotion/legal>
- 18 http://nabc.cals.cornell.edu/Publications/Reports/nabc_25/25_7_1_StudentVoice.pdf