

Organic Consumers Association: Activist group promotes 'fear and deception' about crop biotechnology, promotes vaccine conspiracy theories, calls for 'American revolution'

Organic Consumers Association (OCA) led by Ronnie Cummins is listed by the USDA as an "organic agricultural products marketing and trade resource" organization.^[1] OCA is one of the most aggressive of North America's anti-GMO activist groups and its website contains advertisements for a wide variety of organic products and alternative medical 'cures'.

OCA touts on its home page that it is "campaigning for health, justice, sustainability, peace, and democracy." However, many of the causes and organizations that it supports are controversial at best and fringe at worst.

OCA campaigns relentlessly against many aspects of [conventional agriculture](#) and biotechnology in particular. It has contributed [\\$554,000 to start up and fund the US Right to Know](#) organization, which targets scientists and science communicators with controversial Freedom of Information requests in an attempt to tie them to the biotech industry. [See Biotech Gallery: [USRTK](#)]

It's major strategy since the late 1990s has been to demonize conventional food, the use of biotechnology most specifically, as a means to promoting organic food, 'natural' products and the nutrition-supplements industry, which is the main source of OCA's profits. After the U.S. Department of Agriculture adopted a final rule on "National Organic [food] Standards" in 2000, OCA's Cummins made it clear that conventional farming and food were his targets. In *BioDemocracy* (OCA's newsletter), Cummins spelled out his group's (and his movement's) game plan:

The challenge over the next months and years will be to see if organic consumers, environmental organizations, farm activists, churches, and public interest groups can build upon this tactical victory and begin making headway in the bigger battle — driving genetically engineered crops off the market all over the world, beginning to phase-out [sic] the most dangerous practices of industrial agriculture, and jump-starting the conversion of the majority of the world's agriculture to organic methods as soon as possible.

According to the website Rational Wiki,

...the OCA frequently reposts articles from woo-pushers and conspiracy theorists such as [Joseph Mercola](#), [NaturalNews](#), and [Alex Jones](#) on subjects such as [water fluoridation](#), [food irradiation](#), [9/11 conspiracy theories](#), [raw milk](#), [vaccines](#), [homeopathy](#), [nuclear power](#), and more. Their position on all of those subjects is in line with [appeals to nature](#) and contrary to the scientific consensus. They have a long history of using fearmongering and pseudoscience to push their agenda of converting the world to organic agriculture. Anyone who disagrees with them is [labeled a shill](#).

OCA has been adamantly anti-vaccine for years, attacking everything routine infant vaccines, which it calls “[neurological toxins](#)”. When the [human papillomavirus vaccine](#) was made available, it attacked “the mainstream media [which] piled on with remarks from the usual “prestigious” medical professionals who asserted HPV vaccinations safety and remarkable success at reducing ovarian cancer”.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, OCA maintained its conspiratorial views on vaccines and the companies that have developed them. It has been promoting unsubstantiated conspiracies about the origins of SARS-Cov-2. Saying it is “[not anti-vax, but pro vaccine safety](#)”—the standard phrase of anti-vaxxers—OCA promotes what it calls “freedom of choice” while claiming that vaccines are not to be trusted:

[M]ost of the information about vaccines comes from the mainstream media (whose largest advertisers are Big Pharma), regurgitating propaganda from the pharmaceutical companies, who of course make **enormous profits from selling vaccines**. The corporate mass media’s supposedly factual information is compromised, since it arises from a **clear conflict of interest**.

For example, there has been almost no coverage of the fact that the new arsenal of COVID-19 vaccines, which are actually experimental drugs, and in some cases genetically engineered messenger RNA gene therapy drugs, never before injected into humans on a large scale, **do not even claim, in their applications for emergency use approval from the government, to prevent infection, hospitalization, or death from COVID-19. ... Big Pharma and their allies want to stamp out freedom of speech, alternative medical information, and freedom of choice by banning us on social media and search engines. This is an attack on the very basis of freedom and democracy.**

In 2017, OCA [issued a manifesto urging](#) a “consumer revolution and political revolution,” writing, “the handful of corporations that control our food, farming, energy and pharmaceutical industries have corrupted the marketplace so that it generates enormous profits for CEOs and shareholders at the expense of consumer choice, human health and the environment.” The “consumer revolution” consisted of transforming farming to “100% organic” and making it the norm in the marketplace.

In a section labeled “Political Revolution 2017-2020”, it called for supporting all Bernie Sanders-endorsed candidates and listed a long list of social changes, including only supporting candidates who advance

regenerative farming. The manifesto directed readers to visit the web page [“Our Revolution to Win”](#) to find positions its support. The site issues its own set of political and environmental demands to “defend democracy”,

HISTORY

OCA’s original name was the “Pure Food Campaign” (in 1988) when anti-technology futurist Jeremy Rifkin at the Foundation on Economic Trends helped launch the initiative as a spin off of their “Beyond Beef” initiative with Andrew Kimbrell. Kimbrell and Cummins spun off their campaign into a new organization called the International Center for Technology Assessment, from which the Pure Food Campaign was later spun off to become the Organic Consumers Association. One of OCA’s stated goals is to achieve 100 percent organic agriculture in the next 50 years^[2] and the group tackles a range of issues which discourage conventional production (including conventional pesticide use, animal welfare and corporate ~~disparage conventional production~~ for the past 10-plus years has been GMOs.



OCA founder Ronnie Cummins got his start campaigning

against animal agriculture with Andrew Kimbrell at the Foundation on Economic Trends, then later as part of the [Center for Food Safety](#). OCA was formally recognized as a separate 501c3 entity by the IRS in 1998. They added the 501c4 campaign organization Organic Consumers Fund (OCF) in 2002 to engage in political lobbying and ballot initiative campaigns.

OCA’s claims their membership database to contain between 850,000 and 2,000,000 names and email addresses, and OCA “partners” include at least 3,000 food co-ops and organic retailers. The group cloaks its agenda in the guise of food safety, children’s health, fair trade, and environmental sustainability, but its principal aim is to promote the demand for organic retail products.

To raise money, Cummins has cast Monsanto as villain (along with other biotech companies). OCA has also been critical of large-scale organic marketers including Dean Foods and Aurora Organic Dairy. Its stated reason is that these companies have “corporatized” organic in a way that has strayed from the movement’s social justice mission. That criticism generally reflects the fact that larger organic companies’ have been reluctant to contribute money to his cause. OCA also maintains a 501c4 political lobbying arm.

OCA also funds attack NGOs, such as the U.S. Right to Know (USRTK), a group specifically established,

with \$47,500 in seed money from OCA, to [target biotechnology researchers](#) by using the Freedom of Information Act. [Science](#) magazine likened this tactic to Climategate, in which global warming deniers attempted to smear climate change scientists by abusing the Freedom of Information Act.

Organization

* Organic Consumers Association 501(c)3

Ronald Cummins, president and CEO, board chair

6771 South Silver Hill Drive, Finland, MN 55603

Registration office: 6010 Cliff Estate Road, Little Marais, MN 55614

Federal EIN: 41-1908341

MN State nonprofit corporation file #1R-635 filing date 5/22/1998

Latest report budget (2013): income – \$3,073,719; expenditures: \$2,842,517; carried over net assets at end of year: \$969,111[3]

5 voting board members, claimed 19 paid employees in 2012 with a total of \$720,000 paid in salaries.

Stated organization purpose: “Consumer education – to increase consumer awareness/knowledge of organic and agricultural production to promote the development/ expansion of the organic/ sustainable agriculture model.”[4]

* Organic Consumers Fund 501(c)4

Ronald Cummins, president and CEO, board chair

6771 South Silver Hill Drive, Finland, MN 55603

Federal EIN: 41-2020937

MN nonprofit corporation file #1y-475 – filing date: 10/26/2001

Latest report budget (2012): income – \$1,671,937; expenditures: \$1,679,573

3 voting members, no claimed employees in 2012

Stated organization purpose: “To improve public health and the environment”[5]

CAMPAIGNS / ACTIVITIES

Via OCA and their OCF lobbying arm this group engages in various grassroots campaigns attacking GMOs, pesticides and other non-organic conventional agriculture practices funded by their organic food and alternative health and supplements industry “sponsors.” Their claims range from GMOs are killing bees and butterflies to allegations that consumers can protect themselves against Mad Cow Disease by purchasing organic meat. They oppose the pasteurization of milk and promote the raw milk movement.

They promote their campaign claims via partnership with a range of commercial organic, natural product, herbal supplement and alternative health marketers including [Mike Adams](#) Natural News, Joe Mercola’s Mercola.com and via joint advocacy initiatives with groups like the Weston A. Price Foundation and [Greenpeace](#) [6] and frequently repost stories from “junk” sites that attack science journalists or science journalists that have critiqued OCA’s practices or allies. Their anti-GMO campaigns include the “GE Food

Alert” partnership with Friends of the Earth, Center for Food Safety, Institute for Agriculture Trade Policy, National Environmental Trust, and various state Public Interest Research Groups[7]

OCA leadership also engages in anti-vaccine campaigns promoting claims that vaccines are dangerous and opposing measures to make vaccinating children mandatory[8] [9] and claim there are no long term benefits to vaccines.[10] Cummins [calls](#) therapeutic antibiotics in animals “a slippery slope,” writing that its use would “undermine consumer confidence in organics. It’s the same position [I have] as on human vaccines. They are dangerous, and that’s why I didn’t vaccinate my kid.”

COVID vaccine denialism

Since the 2020 outbreak of the SARS-Cov-2 virus, Cummins and OCA donor [Joseph Mercola](#), a well-known anti-GMO activist and alternative medicine proponent, have made increasingly alarmist (and disproved) claims about the virus’ origins as well as about the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness. In [a new book](#), [Cummins and Mercola](#) claim that the virus was engineered not just in a lab, but a bioweapons lab in Wuhan, China. Of course, [published reports](#) show that genetically, the virus could not have been engineered and is more likely the result of a “[spillover](#)” from bats and other animals.

Learn more about [Joseph Mercola](#) from the Genetic Literacy Project profiles.

The book further claims that all virus data (PCR tests, case counts, mortality, vaccine efficacy) is manipulated, and that the vaccines are not effective and in fact unsafe (although worldwide cases have decreased and [new data](#) on existing vaccines underscore their ability to safely stave off disease). The authors further allege that regulators, drug companies and possibly “global elites” have suppressed simple, cheap ways to prevent and treat COVID-19, just to encourage acceptance of vaccinations (which [themselves](#) are simple and at least for consumers, inexpensive).

Pure Food

Claiming, “Organic Consumers Association wants a moratorium on genetically engineered food and encouraging organic food. Stop GMO pollution” this was the first campaign of OCA launched in 2008 with the PureFood.org website set up by OCA consultant Steve Urow of Green People.[11]

Toxic Taters

OCA is one of the Spring 2013 founding members of the Toxic Taters coalition with the [Pesticide Action Network North America](#), [Food and Water Watch](#), Campaign for Food Justice Now, Clean Up the River Environment, Corporate Accountability International, Family Farm Defenders, the Green Party of Minnesota, Headwaters Food Sovereignty Council, Indigenous Environmental Network, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Land Stewardship Project, Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG), Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, Real Food Challenge and the White Earth Land Recovery Project.[12]

Millions Against Monsanto

OCA's "[Millions Against Monsanto](#)" campaign initially never drew more than a few hundred supporters to any single protest, but that didn't stop Cummins from branding it in a grandiose fashion. OCA was one of the few members of the coalition that cooked up the StarLink corn scare, and it was through this exercise that they demonstrated the effectiveness of discipline in online grassroots organizing. In 2000 when the National Organic Standards began to take shape, Cummins (armed with money from Aveda founder Horst Rechelbacher) organized thousands of organic food devotees to deluge the USDA with political ultimatums. In a later newsletter, he claimed the USDA had "given in to most of the demands of the organic community."

Safeguard Organic Standards (SOS) Campaign

The Safeguard Organic Standards (SOS) campaign focuses on attacking large corporations investing in organic production. OCA claims these commercial players want to lower standards to claim their foods are "organic" and can market them accordingly and sell them to an unaware public. The campaign targets various companies, including Horizon and Aurora organic dairy products, such as the brand Silk (soy milk).

OCA claimed, "In late 2005, despite receiving over 350,000 letters and phone calls from OCA members and the organic community, Republican leaders in Congress attached a rider to the 2006 Agricultural Appropriations Bill to weaken the nation's organic food standards in response to pressure from large-scale food manufacturers."

KEY PEOPLE

- Ronnie Cummins, president and board chair of both OCA and OCF – paid \$99,590 in 2013
- Alexis Baden-Mayer, political director[\[13\]](#) (arrested at 2014 USDA organic NOSB meeting)[\[14\]](#)
- Rosemary Welch, OCA board treasurer, OCF general manager, board director (Ronnie Cummins spouse) – paid \$53,600 in 2013 by OCA, paid \$31,145 by OCF[\[15\]](#)
- Pat Kerrigan, OCA board secretary, paid 29,677 in 2013, also paid OCA Field Organizer since 2013 [\[16\]](#)
- Tom Taylor, OCA director
- David Abazs, OCA director
- Robyn Seydel, OCA director
- Honor Schauland, OCF board secretary and content management and office management assistant [\[17\]](#)
- Judy Linman, OCF treasurer 2012, secretary 2011
- Amy Gardner, OCF treasurer 2011
- Mary Anselment, OCA office manager[\[18\]](#)
- Zack Kaldveer, OCA Assistant Media Director/ Yes on Prop 37 Right to Know Campaign[\[19\]](#)
- Katherin Paul, OCA associate director (writer, fundraiser, communications manager), formerly with CommonDreams.org.[\[20\]](#)

- Kaare Melby, OCA social media coordinator[\[21\]](#)
- Lindsey Merkel, OCA intern[\[22\]](#)
- Ben Lilliston, former OCA communications director, current vice president with Institute for Agriculture Trade Policy[\[23\]](#)
- Beka Mulberg, OCA documentary production assistant for “Stop Monsanto from Poisoning Hawaii” in partnership with Hawaii GMO Justice Coalition[\[24\]](#)

OCA’s national advisory board has included Will Allen, the Vermont farmer and author of *The War on Bugs*; Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians; Jay Feldman of the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides; Jim and Rebecca Goodman, the Wisconsin organic farmers who have been plaintiffs in lawsuits covering everything from GMOs to mad cow disease; Jean Halloran of the [Consumers Union](#); Annie Hoy of the Ashland (Oregon) Community Food Store; John Kinsman of Family Farm Defenders, *Diet for a Small Planet* author Frances Moore Lappé; *Mad Cowboy* author Howard Lyman; “La Vida Locavore” blogger Jill Richardson, and the Indian GMO critic [Vandana Shiva](#).

- Ryan Zynn, OCA National Campaign Director, currently Organic & Fair Trade Coordinator at Dr Bronner’s Magic Soaps[\[26\]](#)
- Elizabeth Darrow Nardi, former OCA East Coast Campaign Manager and Center for Food safety Pure Food Campaign project manager, currently operations director at New Seasons Organic Market.[\[27\]](#)

FUNDING SOURCES

OCA reports donations from a range of organic, alternative health and natural product marketing company sponsors, foundations and individual donors.

- 2007 reported revenue: \$1,026,092
- 2008 reported revenue: \$1,082,413
- 2009 reported revenue: \$896,684
- 2010 reported revenue: \$1,373,096
- 2011 reported revenue: \$2,009,522
- 2012 reported revenue: \$2,174,024
- 2013 reported revenue: \$3,073,719

OCF does not report income sources

- 2010 report revenue: \$0 (assets on hand 2010 \$94,486)
- 2011 reported revenue: \$241,487
- 2012 reported revenue: \$1,672,299

Primary income sources: Contributions (corporate, individual, foundations) – including:

- Eden Organic
- Nutiva

- Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps \$100,000 in 2014
- Joe Mercola \$100,000 in 2014[\[28\]](#)

FUNDED SOURCES

OCA reports giving out annual grants (2012) exceeding \$500,000 to other (non-OCA) individuals and organizations both inside and outside of the United States (principally noted as Mexico and Canada).

- Hudson Bay Company, Lincoln, NE is paid (2012) by OCA \$450,000 and (2012) by OCF \$160,512 for fundraising phone solicitations.
- Organic Consumer Fund (2011) transfer \$28,400

In 2014 OCA claimed to have donated more than \$500,000 to mandatory GMO labeling legislative and ballot initiatives in WA, MD, VT, OR, and CA.[\[28\]](#)

Via grants, OCA supports:

- New Organizing Institute, 1133 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036 (2012) \$70,000 in support of VT mandatory GMO labeling initiative
- Vermont Public Interest Research and Education Fund (V-PIRG), 141 Main street, Montpelier, VT 05602 (2012) \$30,000 – statewide citizen mobilization
- Rural Vermont, 13 Barre St, Montpelier, VT 05602 (2012) \$15,000 in support of VT mandatory GMO labeling initiative

Via grants, OCF supports:

- Label Genetically Engineered Foods 501(c)4, 1814 Franklin Street, Oakland, CA 94612 (2012) \$1,185,000 to promote California Ballot Initiative Prop 37 in support of mandatory labeling of GMO foods
- [Just Label It Campaign](#) 501(c)4, 1436 U Street, Washington, DC 20009 (2012) \$60,000 support for Washington State GMO labeling bill
- Vermont Public Interest Research Group 501(c)3, 141 Main Street, Montpelier, VT 05602 (2012) \$10,000 for mobilizing citizens statewide
- Rural Vermont 501(c)3, 15 Barre Street, Montpelier, VT 05602 (2012) \$10,000 in support for Vermont GMO labeling bill
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont 501(c)3 (2012) \$10,000 in support for Vermont GMO labeling bill

AFFILIATIONS

- Center for Food Safety – OCA was originally a campaign of this organization
- U.S. Right to Know – in 2014 OCA was the founding funder for this initiative.
- Pamm Larry
- Adam Eiding

- Max Goldberg, Living Maxwell

CRITICISMS

- Discover Magazine science writer Keith Kloor says OCA uses “fear and deception to advance their cause.”[\[30\]](#)
- Genetic Literacy Project contributing writer Layla Katiraei, PhD claims OCA engages in “misleading claims at best” “to play on people’s sentiments and biases” in raising money and campaigning against GMOs.[\[31\]](#)
- The American Council on Science and Health calls the Organic Consumers Association “always unreliable” and criticizes them for promoting unproven natural cures for diseases like Ebola while demonizing modern medicine and vaccines.[\[32\]](#)
- Forbes Magazine columnist Jon Entine says, “OCA’s misinformation campaigns have become templates for other organic and foodie groups, obscure and mainstream.”[\[33\]](#)

Resources

- [Organic Consumers Association Facebook page](#)
- [Organic Consumers Association on Twitter](#)
- [OCA on YouTube](#)
- [Organic Retail and Consumer Alliance](#), project of the Organic Consumers Association

References

- 1 <http://pubs.nal.usda.gov/sites/pubs.nal.usda.gov/files/srb0301v2005.pdf>
- 2 [Greatest Man to Ever Live: Interview with OCA’s Simon Harris](#), Penn & Teller Bullshit, Showtime, 2006.
- 3 https://www.organicconsumers.org/sites/default/files/oca_990_2013.pdf
- 4 [2012 Organic Consumers Association IRS 990 tax return](#)
- 5 [2012 Organic Consumers Fund IRS 990 tax return](#)
- 6 <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/media-center/news-releases/greenpeace-and-the-organic-con/>
- 7 https://www.organicconsumers.org/old_articles/ge/tacobellban.php
- 8 <http://www.centralmaine.com/2015/02/03/proposal-to-require-vaccine-counseling-a-slap-in-the-parental-face/>
- 9 <http://inthesetimes.com/article/6330>
- 10 <https://www.organicconsumers.org/news/no-historical-benefit-vaccines-polish-study>
- 11 <http://whois.domaintools.com/purefood.org>
- 12 <http://www.toxictaters.org/take-action-3/campaign-supporters/>
- 13 <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/alexis-baden-mayer/10/316/a24>
- 14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpKH11T48cQ&feature=youtu.be>

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- [31](#) [Vermont pro-GMO labeling groups play Monsanto ‘fear card’ in deceptive fund-raising effort](#), by Layla Katiraei, Genetic Literacy Project, July 1, 2014
- [32](#) [Ebola quackery should come as no surprise](#), ACSH, October 29, 2014.
- [33](#) [Organic Lobby Attacks Biotech Advances, Obscures Own Sustainability And Nutrition Doubletalk](#), by Jon Entine, Forbes Magazine, May 21, 2013.