



Germantown, MD



16.3°F

Mostly
Cloudy[Complete Curren](#)
[Hourly Forecast](#) 11

FARM FRESH AG NEWS DELIVERED RIGHT TO YOUR INBOX! **SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**

FREE SIGN UP!
CLICK FOR DETAILS

[All articles](#) [News](#) [Crops](#) [Livestock](#) [Markets](#) [Weather](#) [Farm Living](#) [Opinion & Blogs](#) [Video](#) [WP Twitter](#)**SUBSCRIBE TO FREE ENEWS!**[Classifieds](#) [Subscriptions](#) [Digital editic](#)

Farm groups challenge food company's non-GM pledge

Posted Jan. 5th, 2017 by [Sean Pratt](#)

5

Yogurt maker Dannon is misleading the public by suggesting non-GM crops are more sustainable than GM crops, say opponents

Farmers and food companies have dropped the gloves in the de-bate over genetically modified food.

A number of food companies have recently announced they are introducing non-GM product lines. That is making growers antsy because many rely on biotechnology to keep weeds and insects at bay.

The line in the sand for farm groups was when the Dannon Company announced it was converting its Dannon, Danimals and Oikos brands of yogurt to all non-GM ingredients by 2018.

The Dannon Pledge includes switching the diet for the dairy cows that provide the company with its milk to non-GM crops.

“This was a tipping point,” said Randy Mooney, chair of the U.S. National Milk Producers Federation.

Chris Galen, vice-president of communications with the federation, said Dannon’s announcement was a tipping point because the company is telling farmers what kind of feed to use.

“This is entirely different and a more far-reaching step than just a focus on biotech ingredients in the yogurt itself,” he said in an email.

Related stories in this issue:

- [Consumers search for trustworthy GMO information](#)
- [Grappling with GM animals](#)
- [Farmers have much to teach consumers](#)
- [Public’s anti-GMO perception tainted by media, say Green Party, NFU](#)
- [Case made for labelling, but questions abound](#)
- [Judge GM on a case-by-case basis: experts](#)
- [The debate over GM foods](#)
- [Farmers play important role in building consumer trust](#)
- [Consumers still opposed to GM food](#)
- [Divergence: If GM technology is safe, why don’t consumers trust it?](#)

What dairy farmers find particularly galling is that scientific research shows the GM traits in the corn, soybeans and alfalfa fed to cattle are not present in the meat or milk. So there will be no difference in the yogurt made before or after the Dannon Pledge.

“When something is out there that is outrageously wrong, all of us are going to have to speak up and attack it,” Mooney told reporters during a conference call.

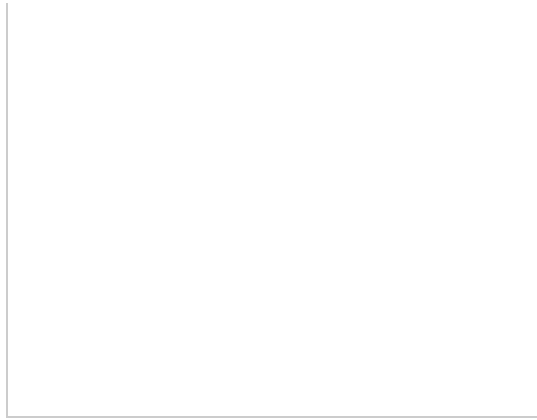
“If this isn’t addressed, we’re going to see a radical change in how food and feed is produced in this country.”

The American Farm Bureau Federation, American Soybean Association, American Sugarbeet Growers Association, National Corn Growers Association, National Milk Producers Federation and U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance published a tersely worded letter they sent to Dannon.

“In our view your pledge amounts to marketing flimflam, pure and simple,” stated the letter.

“It appears to be an attempt to gain lost sales from your competitors by using fear-based marketing and trendy buzzwords, not through any actual improvement in your products.”

ADVERTISEMENT



Dannon shot back with a news release responding to the letter.

“We were surprised to receive a divisive and misinformed letter about our efforts to continue to grow America’s enjoyment of dairy products, including yogurt,” stated the company.

“We believe there is growing consumer preference for non-GMO ingredients and food in the U.S. and we want to use the strong relationships we have with our farmer partners to provide products that address this consumer demand.”

The dispute illustrates the growing divide between the farm community and its food company customers surrounding the GM food issue.

Food companies increasingly want to source non-GM ingredients and to provide labels telling their customers whether products are GM or not.

Meanwhile, farmers continue to embrace the technology. More than 90 percent of the corn, soybeans and canola grown in North America in 2015 were GM varieties.

And farmers have been fighting vigorously against the introduction of mandatory GM labelling laws.

Randy Krotz, chief executive officer of the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, a group that speaks on behalf of about 100 farm organizations, does not accept that food companies are responding to consumer preference.

He believes anti-biotechnology activists are behind decisions like Dannon’s.

“There is a lot of pressure being applied by organizations targeting (food companies) that don’t necessarily represent broad consumer feelings or opinions,” he said during the conference call.

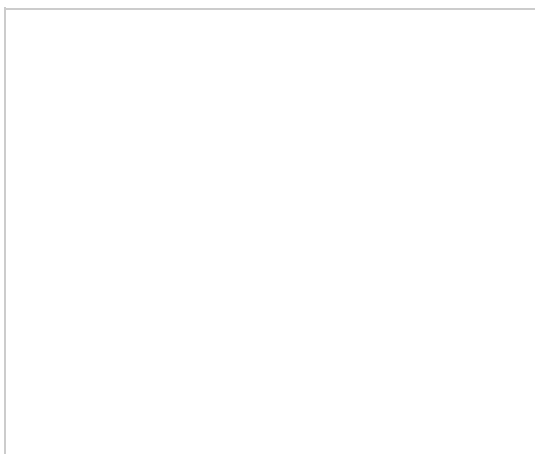
Michael Neuwirth, spokesperson for Dannon, said Krotz is mistaken. The decision to switch half of its product line to GM-free ingredients came from the company’s daily interaction with its customers and from market research data on shopper preferences.

“That’s our business is understanding what people want and that’s the reason we have a

wide range of products,” he said.

Neuwirth said customers want choice and they want to know what they are consuming, which is why the company is now labelling whether its products are GM or not.

ADVERTISEMENT



“We are a food company trying to serve the needs of our shoppers and from that perspective, we believe we are responding to market preferences,” he said.

Farm groups say Dannon is misleading the public by suggesting non-GM crops are more sustainable than GM crops.

“Though touted with great fanfare as a corporate commitment to sustainability and environmental improvement, in reality the Dannon Pledge amounts to a major step backward in truly sustainable food production,” the groups stated in the letter to Dannon.

They contend that a shift away from GM crop production will increase pesticide, water and fossil fuel use and lead to more soil erosion.

They also allege that Dannon is anti-biotechnology.

Neuwirth said Dannon was stunned by the accusations contained in the letter it received, especially the idea that the company is not supportive of science.

He said the company relies on science to ensure the safety and quality of its products and he rejects suggestions that the company is anti-biotechnology. It will continue to offer GM food products in addition to its non-GM lines.

The Dannon Pledge is designed to provide food products that are sustainable, natural and transparent, he said.

Neuwirth thinks farm groups misunderstood that the non-GM initiative falls under the natural plank of that pledge, not the sustainability component.

“We believe sustainable agriculture can be achieved with or without the use of

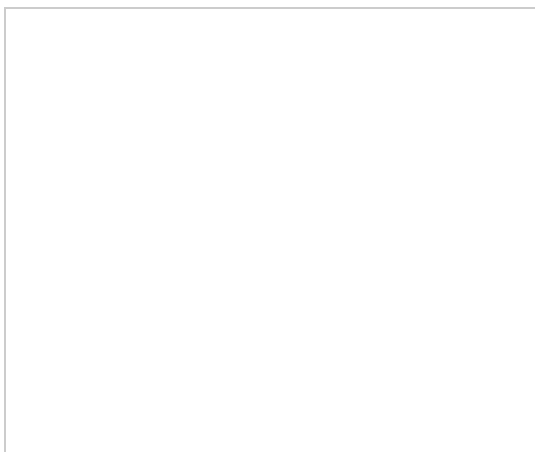
GMOs,” he said.

Part of Dannon’s sustainability pledge is to provide a fixed margin of profit to its farmer partners who provide the company with its milk.

Krotz said farm groups don’t want to get in the way of farmers earning premiums, but they can’t abide when food companies portray GM crop production as un-sustainable or unnatural.

He hopes they are not put in the position where they have to publicly challenge another food company for its actions.

ADVERTISEMENT



“We’d really rather not have to do this again but certainly we will,” said Krotz.

Popular articles

[Farmers overcharged nearly \\$100 million in CGC...](#)
[Divergence: If GM technology is safe, why don't...](#)
[Sask. eliminating health regions](#)
[Girl Power 101 — it's how things get done](#)
[Farmers play important role in building consumer...](#)

About the author

[Sean Pratt](#) — Saskatoon newsroom

Also by this author

[EU could boost flax price](#)
[Farm groups challenge food company's...](#)
[Canola crush, exports on target](#)