

Taking Risks in Ice Cream Industry: Ben & Jerry's Includes 'Everything But' GMOs

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For many Americans, Ben & Jerry's is synonymous with ice cream. Not only does the range of delectable flavor combinations appeal to consumers of all palate preferences, but many get a kick out of the often whimsical [names](#) [1] given to the brand's products, be they freezer aisle staples such as Cherry Garcia or limited edition flavors like the Liz Lemon frozen Greek yogurt named after Tina Fey's iconic 30 Rock character.

Yet for all the clever marketing gambits, Ben & Jerry's takes the responsibility of providing conscientiously crafted ice cream very seriously. In mid-2013, the company announced intentions to completely eliminate genetically modified organisms (GMOs) from its products over the next few years. The switch is ongoing with several notable ingredient adjustments already in place.

As Ben & Jerry's CEO Jostein Solheim mentioned in an [interview on Bloomberg TV's "Market Makers"](#) [2], the bulk of the company's products were already non-GMO and the hardest part has been finding the "little pieces" from suppliers that will make a full-fledged ingredient switch possible. Thus far Ben & Jerry's has had to find new sources for some 110 ingredients to meet non-GMO and Fair Trade standards, meaning the enormity of the decision to become a leader in pushing for change in the ice cream industry cannot be understated.

As discussed in [Non-GMO Foods: U.S. Market Perspective](#) [3], a report published by Packaged Facts last year, one of the biggest consumer concerns in the food industry today is whether or not foods made using ingredients from GMOs are safe for human consumption. Related to this controversy is the issue of whether or not GMO crops are safe for the environment.

Despite the ongoing national debate over GMOs, Ben & Jerry's non-GMO commitment is not without its risks. The \$26 billion U.S. market for ice cream and frozen desserts is a mature one, with 9 out of 10 American households purchasing these products, [according to a 2014 report by Packaged Facts](#) [4]. As a result, opportunities for growth are hard-won in this stable market.

The ice cream industry already faces pressure from public perception as an unhealthy product in an era where consumers are increasingly concerned about obesity and the associated health risks. And though one would assume that Ben & Jerry's non-GMO commitment would earn high unanimous acclaim and support, the company has faced its share of complaints since making the switch.

The removal of the signature titular ingredient in Ben & Jerry's Vanilla Heath Bar Crunch and Coffee Heath Bar Crunch ice cream flavors didn't go unnoticed by

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faithful customers. Due to the company's commitment to sourcing non-GMO ingredients, the Hershey's Heath bars were replaced by fudge-covered toffee pieces, and the desserts were subsequently rechristened Vanilla Toffee Bar Crunch and Coffee Toffee Bar Crunch. The adjustments incited a moderate internet uproar as some consumers left derogatory comments online over the changes to their beloved flavors.

In the end, the company's commitment to non-GMO is apparently worth occasional negative feedback if it means fostering change on a grander scale. According to the company's [website](#) [5]: "We aspire to be an influence in shifting the production of all commodities away from using GMOs. We think mandatory labeling is the first step towards that goal, and believe that as the supply of non-GMO corn, soy and other commodities increases, it will be easier for family farmers to source non-GMO feed. We think that will be a good thing."

This blog is based partly on research featured in two Packaged Facts reports. *Ice Cream and Frozen Desserts in the U.S.: Opportunities in Retail and Foodservice, 8th Edition*, published April 2014, can be found [here](#) [4]. Likewise, *Non-GMO Foods: U.S. Market Perspective* can be purchased [here](#) [3].

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[1] <http://www.benjerry.com/flavors>

[2] <http://www.bloomberg.com/video/ben-jerry-s-keeping-the-ice-cream-industry-cool-tLY8Jlb9QoqP6f0DhxMkgw.html>

[3] <http://www.packagedfacts.com/Non-GMO-Foods-7779884/>

[4] <http://www.packagedfacts.com/Ice-Cream-Frozen-8136075/>

[5] <http://www.benjerry.com/values/issues-we-care-about/support-gmo-labeling/our-non-gmo-standards>