You are what you eat!

The title of this article comes from the original French quote by Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, a French doctor in 1826. His original quote was actually, “tell me what you eat and I shall tell you what you are.”

I found myself investigating a topic (genetically modified food) that seemed irrelevant to the sport of pigeon racing, but as I expanded my research, I came to believe there is a connection in my research to our pigeons. Definitely, the quote applies. Let me explain.
last few years there’s been much discussion about the increase of loss of birds. Most of us attribute the losses to a protected raptor population, cell phone towers, increased electronic interference and the like. After doing extensive research I have another theory I want to put before you. This article is going to explain why I believe the changes I’ve noticed about our pigeons may be caused by something other than the hawks and the aforementioned explanations. The loss of our pigeons’ homing instincts is of great concern to me. As I began learning more about genetically modified foods, the reality of the dangers of them to our pigeons began to sink in, specifically the losses we seem to be experiencing more and more. I believe our pigeons are what they are because of what they eat.

I want to give some background into what exactly are GMOs and why many people are deciding to forego eating them, farmers are fighting against them, and studies are showing they are not only harmful to us, but to our animals. To begin, let’s start with some basic information about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

**WHAT ARE GMOs AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE AS PIGEON FLYERS**

GMOs “are plants or animals that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses or other plants and animals. These experimental combinations of genes from different species cannot occur in nature or in traditional crossbreeding. Virtually all commercial GMOs are engineered to withstand direct application of herbicide and/or to produce an insecticide. Despite biotech industry promises, none of the GMO traits currently on the market offer increased yield, drought tolerance, enhanced nutrition, or any other consumer benefit. Meanwhile, a growing body of evidence connects GMOs with health problems, environmental damage and violation of farmers’ and consumers’ rights” (the nongmoproject.org).
According to a 2014 pro-con discussion about GMOs on Ameri
caradioworks.org, “genetic engineering is fundamentally different
from traditional methods of plant and animal breeding because it
crosses biological barriers, transferring genes from one species to
another.”

Additionally, in a report from May 11, 2012, from Examiner.com
“original DNA of an organism is designed to reject foreign bodies, so in
order to convince the host to accept this parasitic DNA, they use other
DNA from things like E Coli virus and other bacteria to transfer a new
DNA packet into the host plant, tricking the host into accepting it. By
splicing even one gene in, you’re introducing a whole ton of other
uncontrolled unknown traits into the host plant, and therefore into the
food.”

Lastly, from modernghanan.com in a report dated August 27, 2013,
the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that GMOS are “organisms
in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in such a way that
does not occur naturally. A GMO (genetically modified organism) is the
end product of a fusion of genes from different species to create one or
more desired traits or features. The process is also known as Genetic
Engineering (GE) or Genetic Modification (GM).”

So, why is it important to us? Because the feed we are buying
and feeding our pigeons is GMO unless we are purchasing organic or
non-GMO feed. And because we are giving our pigeons this feed, we
may be subjecting them to all the harmful effects GMOs can cause.

WHO IS MICHAEL TAYLOR AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE

Of interest to me is that GMOs are increasingly spoken of in terms
of “safe” by the FDA. Who in the FDA is pronouncing them “safe”? Michael Taylor. So, who is Michael Taylor? In 1976 Taylor, became a
staff attorney for the FDA. In 1981 he became the attorney for the
biotechnology company, Monsanto, where he established and headed
the department on food and drug laws. In 1988 he wrote a paper stating that if a carcinogen was present at low levels in a food, the risk was minimal and should be allowed on the market which gave Monsanto financial benefits. From 1996 to 2000 he was Vice President for Public Policy for Monsanto. In 2009 he served as Senior Advisor to the FDA Commissioner and in 2010, he was appointed by Obama to the newly created post of Deputy Commissioner for Foods. The connection is that Taylor has worked for and promoted Monsanto’s policies of biotechnology regarding our foods and now oversees our food, telling us what is safe. Yet, as I continued unearthing information about GMOs, I found they were anything but safe. In fact, weighing the pros versus the cons of GMOs, the negatives far exceeded the positives.

WHO RECEIVES THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS FROM GMOs WHEN WE BUY THEM

Monsanto, Syngenta, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are involved in the production, patenting and financing of these seeds and are the ones who benefit from the sale of GM seeds.

Is Monsanto looking out for us, or for their profit? Are we receiving benefits from purchasing their product or are we placing ourselves and our birds at risk?

ROUNDUP READY SEEDS AND THE CONNECTION TO THE GRAINS WE USE

Seeds, such as corn, are sold “Roundup Ready” meaning Roundup weed killer is genetically inserted into the seed. When these seeds are planted and weeds crop up around them, the fields can be sprayed with more weed killer which kills the weeds, but will not kill the plant as it already has it in it. The main ingredient in Roundup weed killer is glyphosate. In fact, glyphosate is the main ingredient in most all weed killers. Though we use very little weed killer on our property, we do use
it in areas by the road. In checking our brand, I discovered the first ingredient listed was glyphosate! Needless to say, we no longer have the product.

Another step in the genetic engineering is the use of BT (Bacillus thuringiensis), a bacterium taken out of the soil. Farmers use BT because it is a natural bacterium they can spray on their plants. The EPA claims that BT is safe for human consumption because it has a” history of safe use”. But, I found from Seeds of Deception a report from India where the village people allowed their animals to graze on cotton plants for about 8 years and experienced no problems. Once the BT toxin was sprayed on the plants and the animals were allowed to graze again on the cotton plants, all the animals died.

Let’s take a look at glyphosate. The ingredient in Roundup weed killer and what is genetically spliced into seeds by Monsanto, according to the National Pesticide Information Center, is glyphosate, “a non-selective systemic herbicide that is applied directly to plant foliage. It was first reported as a herbicide in 1971 and registered for use by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) in 1974. Some plants are genetically modified to be resistant to glyphosate. Examples are corn, cotton and canola. “

DANGERS OF GLYPHOSATE TO OUR BIRDS

The American Academy of Environmental Medicine was the organization that identified Gulf War Syndrome and food allergies and chemical sensitivity, and as far back as 2009 began to state that all doctors should prescribe non-GMO diets to all patients. They said, and I will quote them here, “animal feeding studies have causally linked GMOs to things like infertility, immune system problems, accelerated aging, vital organ damage, gastrointestinal problems and dysregulation of cholesterol and insulin.” The FDA allows Monsanto to do its own testing, conduct no human testing, and no long term testing of their genetically modified organisms and simply submit their results for automatic
approval by the FDA is questionable. In fact, the only studies that have been submitted have been conducted by independent laboratories and medical facilities.

I found another article from the BioTech InfoNet Technical Paper, October, 2004, that reports that “G (glyphosate) is the active ingredient utilized in nearly 75% of all edible GM (genetically modified) plants that have been engineered to tolerate high levels of this form of G (the roundup ready plants).” The increased use of herbicides to kill the weeds has created super-weeds, meaning more herbicide is needed to kill the weeds and in increasingly more potent mixtures. To quote again from the BioTech, “there has been a more than 1900% increase in G use on Roundup Ready soybeans from 1994 to 2006.” It is not a typing error, it is 1900%. One of the closing statements from this article is pertinent not only to us, but to our pigeons. “The researchers concluded that, the proprietary mixtures available on the market could cause cell damage and even death around residual levels to be expected, especially in food and feed derived from Roundup formulation-treated crops.” This information is not to be taken lightly when you realize that according to Jeffrey Smith, in his book Seeds of Deception, points out that “85% of the corn in the United States is genetically engineered either to produce an insecticide or survive applications of herbicide and about 91% to 93% of the soybean crop is genetically engineered not to die when sprayed with Round Up herbicides.” With no labeling on these products we are being kept uninformed as to the potential dangers GMOs are presenting to our pigeons.

WHAT DO GMOS HAVE TO DO WITH PIGEON FLYERS

As you may know, we encourage ravens to nest on our property to help us combat the problems of hawks attacking our pigeons when we loft fly them. The ravens are vigilant in keeping the hawks at bay while our birds fly. To help keep them on the property we keep our raven feeder filled with left over pigeon feed and fresh water. I have noticed
over the last year that the ravens, doves, blue jays and other birds that frequent the feeder do not eat the corn. I tried not putting any new feed into the feeders, leaving only the corn, thinking that with nothing else available the corn would be eaten. It wasn’t. They simply came for the water and left. Sometimes at night we have squirrels that visit the feeder and eat whatever scraps remain. When the corn was the only thing that remained, even the squirrels wouldn’t eat it.

Another thing I noticed was that when I gave my chickens the left over pigeon feed, they too would not eat the corn. I bought pigeon pellets for them, thinking the extra protein would be good for egg laying benefits. The chickens do not like the pellets either. I turned once again to the internet and found an article that addressed pigeon pellets and corn. Here’s the answer Kathy Miller on answers.com provides to the question, “anyone ever try B-meg pigeon pellets and found their pigeons and chickens didn’t want to eat them? They are cheap, but my pigeons seem to dislike them more than my chickens, who only eat them if there is no other choice and they are starving.” Answer: “pigeon food has a lot of corn in it. They don’t like corn that much anyway and if it is GMO corn, well, no animal is dumb enough to eat that, except the cows and such. I open a can of corn, all I have to do to see if my cats will eat it. If they do not it is GMO. Then I tried to give it to the stray dogs. They would not eat it either. I laid it in the yard and even the coons and possums didn’t touch it. The birds didn’t eat it. It just stayed there!” Are the birds and chickens telling us to stay away from a product we seem convinced they must have, or are they just not eating the corn because they can smell the poisons it contains?

When reading the pigeon forum the topic of genetically modified organism was being discussed. Posted on April 19, 2013, the question was “is the feed I am giving my birds genuinely free from GMOs? Is this a concern for you or not? Are there any indications/labels on your feed stating that it is GMO free? I think that crops containing built-in insecticides are bound to detrimentally affect the performance of racing pigeons and if left unchecked it will eventually affect the entire sport worldwide. Imagine having to feed your pigeons GMO feed over a long
period of time. Monsanto’s actions are designed to maximize its corporate profits, not to serve the people. Its entire seed-and-herbicide business model is designed to trap farmers in a system of economic dependence – to turn farmers into indentured servants who can never return to traditional farming after the soil has been destroyed by Roundup.”

This was something I had been thinking about as I went further in my research; whether or not the performance of our birds is being affected by what we are feeding them.

The answer to the question above, posted on the forum later the same day reads, “I have given it a lot of thought. When young birds came out I found that 80% of the grain coming into the UK is GM grain and it is in almost every type of pigeon feed and the bread we are eating just now. I know a lot of farmers are now refusing to use it so they must be having problems with it. A professor at Aberdeen University discovered that feeding GM corn to rats made their hair fall out and break out in large sores all over their body. He said in his report that in his opinion when the rats were fed GM corn their immune system collapsed. The government shut him up. This was the man that told the government that mad cow could transfer to humans. The government rubbed his claim and look what happened over there! Food for thought, guys.”

Another post dated August 15, 2013, “three neonicotinoid pesticides which affect bees homing instinct are now banned by EC for two years pending further investigation. The BBC TV ran a program around 10 days ago with clips of the experiment with radio-tagged bees getting lost in a journey of only a few hundred yards.”

And finally, another post from August 15, 2013, “I found out 8 years ago we are already feeding GMO grains to our birds. It’s in all our feed, just ask your supplier.”
I never thought about what our feed was comprised of, I just knew whether it was a particular brand and what the percentage of protein it contained. Now, I wanted to know, what had we been buying? It’s all “after the fact” but, I have to keep telling myself, better late than never. I called six suppliers here in California who told me their feed stores carry GM grains for pigeons as there is no demand for it to be otherwise. On the other hand, I found a store in Washington State called Scratch and Peck, and in conversation with them, they told me that they are non-GMO certified. On their website I put my zip code in and did a search for stores within a 100 mile radius that carried their feed and found a store. The store I found delivers the feed to its customers within 20-30 miles of their homes to encourage continued business with them. We are very excited to learn this and next month our first order of non-GMO feed arrives. In the meantime we are purchasing organic popcorn from an organic supply house.

STUDIES SHOW EFFECTS OF GMOs ON HOMING INSTINCTS

This section was the one I found most interesting because these studies of honey bees found evidence to link the use of GMOs to the loss of homing instincts of bees. Unfortunately, I could not find any studies on homing pigeons. The research that was done with honey bees, who also have the inborn trait of homing, are applicable to our pigeons’ inborn homing instinct. It is widely reported honey bees are disappearing in massive numbers. Though many things might be contributing to this, I think there may be a link between pesticides and the disappearance. “Are honey bees the canary in the coal mine? What are honey bees trying to tell us that we humans should be paying more attention to? (Jerry Hayes, Florida Dept. of Agriculture.)

An article from the Prairie Advocate, July, 2012, tells the story of how Terrence Ingram’s bees and hives wound up being taken by the Illinois State Department of Agriculture. Ingram had an ongoing study, in fact over 15 years, on Monsanto’s Roundup and his documented
evidence that Roundup kills bees. Interestingly, the state stole the
queen bee and the hive he’d been using to conduct his research. While
Ingram was off his property, the Department came onto his property
and stole his bees and his research. In his studies, Ingram claimed that
250 of his colonies had been killed off over the years by Monsanto’s
broad-spectrum herbicide, used in large quantities on both conventional
and genetically engineered crops. His research also showed that
Roundup can lead to what’s called chilled brood. He explains that chilled
brood is when “Roundup kills the adult bees there are not enough bees
left in the hive to keep the young bees (brood) warm, and the young
bees die from the cold (chilled brood).

A dwindling bee colony is a serious problem. The National
Resources Defense Council (NRDC) estimates that without bees to act as
pollinators, “the United States alone could lose $15 billion worth of
crops.”

A study by the journal Insect Conservation and Diversity from
March, 2012, supported earlier studies by the University of Minnesota in
2011, that “pollen from corn that was genetically modified to produce its
own insecticide caused high mortality rates in monarch butterfly
caterpillars and believe the dramatically decreasing populations of bees
both in the United States and abroad are directly related to genetically
engineered plants and their pollen too. “

Multiple studies and results reported in organicconsumers.org,
January, 2008, discussed the declining honey bee, the increased use of
GMOs and pesticide usage. The ones that were of importance to me
were the ones focusing on the inborn trait of honey bees to home. Those
studies I offer now. First, Penn State entomologist D. Cox-Foster,
PhD, says there are “more pathogens than she’s ever seen before in
honey bees. She sees possibilities that include pesticides and GMO
crops. “ Dr. D Sherman, Plant Pathologist, Senior Scientist in the Food
and Environment Program, in evaluating genetically modified crops says,
“it’s hard to know what the implications are for bees, but one of the two
main genetically engineered crops and the one most widely planted in
the U.S. and around the world are herbicide-tolerant crops – especially herbicide-tolerant soybeans. At least half of the soybeans in the U.S. are resistant to a particular type of pesticide called glyphosate. The trade name of the most common type is called Roundup.”

Jerry Hayes, Florida Dept. of Agriculture, addresses the loss of the homing instinct of the honey bees; “the interesting thing about the Colony Collapse Disorder is that bees are leaving the colony and not coming back, which is highly unusual for a social insect to leave a queen and its brood or young behind. They are seemingly going out and can’t find their way back home. Imidachloprid (my note - I found this to be what’s used in Advantage Flea and Tick medication) when it is used to control termites, does exactly the same thing. One of the methods it uses to kill termites is that the termites feed on this material and then go out to feed and can’t remember how to get home. And it also causes their immune systems to collapse, causing what would be normal organisms to become pathogenic in them (bees). “

This causes me to believe that the major reason the number of losses we are experiencing is due to the feed rather than the hawks, cell towers, and etc. The research findings that the bees simply couldn’t find their way back home is something we should consider if we continue to feed our pigeons the GMO altered feed. Rather than dismiss this finding, I continued to investigate what GMOs are capable of damaging.

GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR LABELING AND TESTING

The concern about the dangers of GMOs surfaced in 1992. The government had a person in charge of policy at the FDA who would decide whether or not foods had to be labeled as being genetically modified (GMOs) and whether or not those foods needed to be tested for possible health risk links. The FDA said it “wasn’t aware of any information showing that genetically modified foods were any different
and therefore no testing and no labeling were required” (Smith). The person in the FDA who made that determination was Michael Taylor. He is now the U.S. Food Safety Czar.

WHICH COUNTRIES BAN GM CROPS AND WHY THEY SAY NO!

There are numerous countries who ban GMOs, such as Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Thailand, Madeira, South Australia, Japan, India, New Zealand, Germany (a ban on corn), and Ireland.

Russia also bans GMOs. In fact, in a news release from rt.com/news dated January 7, 2014, “Russian scientists are calling for a 10-year moratorium on GMOs to thoroughly study their influence on human health, stressing that such examinations are vital.” According to Russia’s Vice President of National Association for Genetic Safety, Irina Ermakova, in a report to Interfax New Agency, “it has been proven that not only in Russia, but also in many other countries in the world, GMO is dangerous. Methods of obtaining the GMO are not perfect, therefore, at this stage, all GMOs are dangerous. Consumption and use of GMOs obtained in such way can lead to tumors, cancers and obesity among animals.”

Reported in the Los Angeles Times, December 27, 2013, “China rejects shipments of genetically modified corn” reads the headline. The article goes on to state, “China rejected two shipments – almost 546,000 tons – of U.S. dried distiller’s grain, a corn byproduct, because it contained genetically modified material. The first shipment 545,000 tons, was rejected last week in Shanghai, the second shipment, 758 tons, was rejected Monday. Chinese authorities said the shipments have been returned and are urging American officials to improve their inspection procedures to ensure they comply with Chinese quality standards”.

Reuters reports September 11, 2013, that “agriculture officials in Washington are testing samples of alfalfa after a farmer reported his hay was rejected for export because it tested positive for a genetically modified trait. Biotech alfalfa is approved for commercial production in the United States, but many foreign and domestic buyers require that supplies not be genetically modified, and the possible presence of GMO modified alfalfa in export supplies could result in lost sales for U.S. farmers. Just this summer, Japan and South Korea stopped buying some U.S. wheat because GMO was found in the shipment.

Countries are paying attention to our GMO development and they are not convinced of the safety of the products, are we paying attention to the GMO development and the lack of safety for our birds?

IF FARMERS DON’T WANT GMOs, WHY ARE WE BUYING THEM?

I want to begin with an older article from June 2007 from The Organic & Non-GMO Report. In this article a farmer, Paul Keiser, from Marne, Michigan, who breeds chickens and ducks, suspected GM corn may have caused illnesses in his chickens. Keiser says, “my chickens weren’t functioning the way they had previously. They were falling, not setting on eggs adequately and not caring for their chicks.” The article goes on to say that Keiser overheard a farmer at a local market say that the bags of corn he was buying for feed that were supposed to be non-GMO could actually be genetically modified corn. Keiser decided to find out whether or not his corn was GMO. He bought corn from his supplier and sent in a 6.5lb. sample to Genetic ID, an Iowa-based GMO testing lab. Keiser says a representative from Genetic ID told him “the GMO level could have been as high as 50% in his corn.” Keiser continues to test his corn and is “concerned about problems caused by modern agricultural practices. The whole food supply is threatened, and GMOs are one of the threats. Agricultural chemicals are killing soils and a lot of farmland is becoming desert.” The feed mill owner was buying corn from several farms and mixing it together with the result being feed that
was GMO compromised. Now Kaiser buys his corn from a certified organic corn distributor in his area.

According to the Soil Association, 2013, “Food from GM-fed animals is not labeled, you cannot avoid it unless you choose organic produce”. So, unless farmers know the source of their feed, the chance that they are purchasing GM feed is highly probable.

An article dated December 28, 2013, on www.nongmoreport.com reports that there is a “growing demand for non-GMO corn and soybeans” which is creating opportunities for farmers to make money. Kade McBroom, a fourth generation farmer in Quilin, Missouri, wants to build a non-GMO soybean processing plant in his area. “McBroom, who is 26, farms about 3200 acres with his father, growing rice, corn, soybeans and a small amount of wheat. He wants to build the facility to process non-GMO soybean meal for animal feed.” Asked about glyphosate, he says “using Monsanto’s Roundup Ready GMO soybeans is being rendered ineffective by herbicide resistant weeds, glyphosate is a useless chemical; it will kill grass but not weeds.” He says he already has a potential buyer for his non-GMO soybean oil, North Carolina-based Whole Harvest.

Another farmer, James Frantzen, 25, and his father are well-known and respected organic hog farmers in Iowa. James has his own farm in Elma, Iowa, where he grows organic corn, soybeans, small grains such as wheat and oats, hay, and pasture and raises organic beef, cows and hogs. James says “there is a strong demand for non-GMO feed for hogs, beef, dairy cows and poultry. He says that he has gotten calls from large hog operations that want non-GMO feed because GMO feed is causing reproductive problems in their hogs.” James says “I’m at the right place at the right time” in reference to Whole Foods Market announcing that foods sold in its stores containing genetically modified ingredients would require labels by 2018.

Farmers are witnessing the devastation caused by the GM crops and what the GM crops are doing to animals. Now it’s time we pay
attention to the devastation they present to our birds as our pigeons are consuming these grains.

**DISEASES AND GMOs THAT MAY AFFECT SOMEONE YOU KNOW**

With the introduction of GMOs into our food chain, and the increased use of them alongside of insecticides and herbicides, there is an increase in diseases. On the gmo-awareness site I found the following problems have increased along with the increased sale and distribution and use of GMOs: food allergies, Type 2 Diabetes, and autism.

The Academy of Environmental Medicine concluded that “studies in animals have shown that there is at last a causal relationship between GM foods and infertility, faster aging, poor insulin regulation, changes to major organs and the gastrointestinal system, immune problems such as asthma, allergies and inflammation”.

This last study was an eye-opener, to realize that the GM genes that have been spliced into our foods stay inside of us and continue to function. The studies were done by Genetic Science Review, World Journal of Gastoenterology, and the Journal of Dairy Science, dated 1994, 1997, 2001, 2001, 2002 and 2003. “The only published human feeding experiment verified that genetic material inserted into GM soy transfers into the DNA of intestinal bacteria and continues to function. This means that long after we stop eating GM foods, we may still have their GM proteins produced continuously inside us. If the antibiotic gene inserted into most GM crops were to transfer, it would create super diseases, resistant to antibiotics. If the gene that creates Bt-toxin in GM corn were to transfer, it might turn our intestinal flora into living pesticide factories. Animal studies show that DNA in food can travel into organs throughout the body, even into the fetus.”
This means that if our pigeons eat the feed that has been modified, the genes within the grains will stay active and can affect their offspring. I know we have had pigeons die for apparently “no reason” and couldn’t attribute their death to anything in particular. Knowing that organisms within the bird could have been present from GM grain, it may offer an explanation for the deaths.

TIME FOR PIGEON FLYERS TO JOIN THE TREND TOWARD NON-GMOs

When I called feed stores I found that there is a heavy demand for non-GMO feed for cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry. No one is asking for non-GMO pigeon feed. It could be because there have been no studies done specifically with pigeons (that I could find anyway) to call our attention to the health problems created by the GMOs. It could be that we have the thought that we’ve feed them what they are getting now for years and if it worked then, it should work now. But, we know that the feed is not the same as it was years ago, it is now modified. The DNA in the feed changes the DNA in us and in our birds. I truly believe that the more we know about what we are feeding our pigeons the interest will increase and as the feed stores owners tell me, they “can’t keep up with the demand for organic and non-GMO grains for other animals and poultry.” They tell me the growth is 10 fold in just this past year as more and more people become aware of the dangers of GM feed. It will take time for the change to non-GMO feed. History tells me that many things take time to change. For example, though it took time, we now know the benefits of sunscreen, dangers of smoking and the dangers of second-hand smoke.

The eating of GMO foods is something that may seem new, and basically it is. GMOs were introduced to us by Monsanto around 1996. As with the few other things I just mentioned like sunscreen it takes years to realize there’s a danger there. It is a mere 20 years that GMOs have entered our lives. The affects of eating these foods still haven’t been researched. On the other hand, it is estimated that most of us
would like our food labeled so we know whether or not it is GMO or non-GMO so we can make the choice.

In a LA Times article, January 6, 2014, General Mills announced that Cheerios will no longer be Genetically Modified. The change came about from an overwhelming plea by parents to General Mills to eliminate GMO from the cereal. At Trader Joe’s you find signs throughout the store proclaiming “non GMOs sold here.” Ben & Jerry’s announced in June, 2013, (money.msn.com) that they “would eliminate GMOs from their products and label all products so consumers would know what is in them”. Because the Ben & Jerry’s flavors can include up to 40 ingredients, finding replacements for the GMO ones will take some time. So, they pledge to complete the process in 2014.

**WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OURSELVES ABOUT GMOs**

When you buy produce, there is a sticker on the fruit or vegetable. This PLU code will tell you what you are buying. Conventionally grown fruit consists of four numbers; organically grown fruit has five numbers prefaced by the number 9; and GM fruit has five numbers prefaced by the number 8. If you buy organic products (five numbers prefaced by the number 9), by definition you are buying food that is certified organic and is free of all GM organisms.

You can stay away from products that most likely are GM: corn, soybeans, canola, cottonseed, sugar beets, alfalfa, papaya (from Hawaii and China), some zucchini and yellow zucchini. Other crops to be wary of are rice, tomatoes, dairy products, potatoes, and peas.

You can start buying organic. Buying organic, according to The Cultivator, the Cornucopia Institute, Spring, 2013, means “avoiding genetically engineered organisms, solvent-extracted ingredients, synthetic growth hormones, and other potential hazards to health. Whenever possible choose organic, especially these foods: berries, leafy
greens, cereals, milk, orange juice, apples and apple juice, bread and baked goods, potatoes, grapes, meat and poultry.”

The website www.nongmoproject.org provides all products that are non-GMO by brand name and is very helpful as a reference when shopping. It gives everything from vitamins and supplements to body care, to beverages to feed and seeds. (If you don’t have ready access to a computer, your local library provides free use of one.)

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OUR BIRDS

Start by investigating the feed you give to your birds. Is it organic, is it non-GMO, does your feed store carry either, would they be willing to stock it if say your whole club asked for it? If you can’t find something local, see if there is a supplier nearby that you can use. Start keeping track of any changes you have noticed over time with your birds on GMO feed. Then if you are able to switch over, keep track of those changes too. While you’re at it, you can investigate other products you are using with your pigeons to see if there are harmful herbicides in them that may be dangerous to your pigeons’ health. We did this and found a product we were using for the birds bath water to be very toxic and have switched to using apple cider vinegar in the bath water. The birds like it, and we are getting the same results.

Lastly, read and do your own research and see what you find about GMOs and if it is something that you’d like to eliminate from use for your family and your birds and pets. Since no research that I could find has been done with GMO feed and the pigeon, I would think this is uncharted territory for flyers to enter. My hypothesis is that some changes will be noticed quickly, and some changes will occur over a longer period of time. I will let you know as we will be keeping record of the change over to non-GMOs.
OUR BIRDS ARE WHAT THEY ARE BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY EAT – DO YOU AGREE?

From this Chick’s Point of View, pigeon flyers are the next frontier in joining the fight to eradicate GMOs from the market place. It is up to us to have our feed suppliers start carrying non-GMO products. Not only are we what we eat, but our pigeons are what because of what they eat too. It will be interesting for us to see if there are any changes in our birds once they are on their new non-GMO diet. Of particular interest will be to see whether or not the homing instinct will be affected, and whether or not the losses will stay the same, increase or decrease. If we see a decline in the performance of our pigeons, or discover some type of problem with them, we won’t necessarily medicate more or give more supplements. Now, we will first look at what we are feeding our birds. It will be good to be able to cut down on the shots, medication and supplements and go back to the basics as mentioned in The Pigeon where the health of the bird is largely determined by the loft conditions, breeding and feed. The over-all health and homing instincts of our pigeons may be at risk if we continue to feed them genetically modified food. I believe it is worth it to see if non-GMO feed will make a difference. I believe our birds are what they are because of what they eat. Do you agree?

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