

# CENTERSTORE

## Recycling Program Turns Trash To Cash

By CAROL ANGRISANI

**WILLIAMSVILLE, N.Y.** — Schoolchildren in Tops Friendly Markets' operating areas have good reason to buy the retailer's Enviro-Bag trash bags: They helped create them.

The bags are made from plastic shopping bags students collected and sent to WasteZero, Murrells Inlet, S.C., which recycled them into 13-gallon kitchen and 30-gallon trash bags sold at Tops.

"Kids can actually go and buy something they helped make," said Dawn Currie, WasteZero's marketing director.

Dubbed the School Recycling Program, it benefits the children because their schools receive up to \$1 per pound of bags they collect. Schools can use the money in a variety of ways, from purchasing trees to science and computer equipment.

The bags are also sold at several other grocery chains, including H.E. Butt Grocery Co., Kroger, Schnucks and Lowes. Both Tops and H-E-B market them under their store brands.

Schnuck Markets, St. Louis, was the first retailer to pilot the program in 1991, said spokesman Paul Simon.

One of the reasons Schnucks got involved was because it is a closed-loop program: The same families who turn in plastic bags at local schools can buy the recycled product at Schnucks stores, Simon said.

At the same time, the program provides a much-needed market for recyclables.

"It's not just important to  
*See Recycling, Page 28*



## RETAILERS GO NON-GMO

Natural food retailers and manufacturers are showing support for the Non-GMO Project Verification Program

By JULIE GALLAGHER

PCC Natural Markets is in search of something sweet: a powdered sugar that's free of ingredients derived from genetically engineered corn to be exact. The certified organic grocer hopes to fill a spot on its shelf left vacant after its previous supplier refused to enroll in the Non-GMO (genetically modified organism) Project Verification Program.

The Non-GMO Project is a collaboration of manufacturers, retailers, processors, distributors, farmers and consumers. Products found to contain less than 0.9% GMOs after completing its verification program qualify for the Non-GMO seal. It serves as the first independently verified, uniform way to assure shoppers that a product is, for the most part, free of GM ingredients.

The Non-GMO Project mark is just now popping up on items ranging from Whole Foods' 365 Everyday Value Tortilla Chips to Guayaki Yerba Mate, but independent claims — touting "contain no GMOs" or

"GMO-free" — are nothing new.

In fact, during the 52 weeks ending April 17, packaged foods making these claims accounted for \$786.9 million in sales, up 11.9% vs. the same period last year, according to the Nielsen Co., Chicago. GMO-free is also the fastest-growing health and wellness claim touted by private labels. Sales of these items spiked 68% to \$53.9 million during the same time period.

A few corporate brands are seeking Non-GMO Project Verification. In addition to Whole Foods' 365 Everyday Value, there are its Whole Foods Brand Products, which are sourced to avoid GMOs; the Meijer Naturals GMO-free line, which includes Chocolate Chip Pancake Mix, White Cheddar Popcorn and Corn & Bean Mild Salsa; and items in the H.E. Butt Grocery Co.'s Central Market natural and organic lines.

The products are currying favor with the 53% of Americans avoiding foods that contain GM ingredients, according to a CBS News/*New York Times* poll.

**“What we’re finding is that a lot of the [GMO] claims aren’t really backed up and that’s a problem.”**

**TRUDY BIALIC**  
director of public affairs, PCC Natural Markets

These shoppers’ selection is somewhat limited since more than 75% of processed foods in the average grocery store contain GM ingredients. Not surprising considering that the majority of soy (91%), cotton (87%) and corn (73%) grown in the U.S. comes from GM crops, according to government statistics from 2007.

The U.S. is different from the European Union since it does not regulate disclosure on products manufactured with GM ingredients. Instead, shoppers choosing to exclude these foods rely on a voluntary labeling system, or purchase foods that have been certified organic since they are not allowed to contain GMOs.

The Food and Drug Administration has issued guidance for manufacturers who wish to label foods as GM-free. But in the absence of set standards, it’s difficult for retailers to separate factual claims from fiction.

“What we’re finding is that a lot of the claims aren’t really backed up and that’s a problem,” Trudy Bialic, PCC’s director of public affairs, told *SN*.

Megan Westgate, executive director of the Non-GMO Project, said it’s unlikely that suppliers are willfully misleading shoppers; it’s just that some use verification methods that are more extensive than others.

“There were some companies who were doing a really good job of testing with good best practices in place, but there were others making non-GMO claims that weren’t substantiated by a testing program,” she said. “Consumers had no way of knowing which was which.”

For some retailers, the Non-GMO Project has been the best solution. In fact, Austin-based Whole Foods

Market believed so much in the project’s mission, it became a founding member. Eventually, consumers seeking non-GMO foods will recognize the Non-GMO Project Verification seal on all of Whole Foods’ private-brand items.

“Since there is no U.S. regulation regarding disclosure on products manufactured with GMO ingredients, we are committed to helping our shoppers make confident choices by knowing that what they are buying has been verified as meeting the standards of the Non-GMO Project,” said Michael Besancon, senior global vice president of purchasing for Whole Foods, in a statement.

PCC has likewise gotten behind the project in a big way. It’s begun to require suppliers of products containing corn, soy, canola, cottonseed and other crops considered high-risk for GM to seek Non-GMO Project Verification. If they don’t, and an alternative supplier willing to enroll exists, the product bearing the seal will get the spot on the shelf.

“We’re dropping vendors to pick up other vendors,” said Bialic.

Kikkoman’s Aji Mirin (sweet cooking rice wine) was one item that PCC wasn’t willing to take a chance on since it contains corn syrup. It delisted the cooking wine after Kikkoman declined to

seek verification.

“We created our own substitute rice wine,” said spokeswoman Diana Crane.

Other PCC suppliers have been more willing to comply. Among them are Washington-state farmers Paul and Karrie Klingeman — the first meat vendors to enroll in the Non-GMO Project. The Klingemans join a growing group of natural and organic manufacturers seeking verification for hundreds of products.

A number of these items don’t contain ingredients considered high risk for genetic modification, Westgate said. But they’ve enrolled to reassure shoppers who’d like to steer clear of GMOs, but don’t know which ingredients should raise a red flag.

“We want to make it really easy for people to avoid GMOs if that’s what they’re trying to do,” Westgate said.

Raised awareness is also the objective of the Non-GMO Project’s first Non-GMO month of October and Non-GMO Day on 10.10.10 (Oct. 10, 2010).

To help retailers celebrate, the Non-GMO Project will distribute shelf tags, shelf talkers, posters, shopping guides, window stickers, buttons for staff and other merchandise to interested retailers.

Verified suppliers are re-designing packaging that incorporates the seal so that it will be ready in time for the event.

Organic products are among those that have been verified. Although organics shouldn’t contain GMOs, the risk of cross-pollination between GM and conventional, as well as GM and organic crops, worries most consumers.

The majority of respondents to a Consumer Reports National Research Center telephone poll (58%) expressed concern with contamination of organic food crops by genetic engineering.

A higher percentage of organic food buyers (66%) indicated concern than those who don’t make organic food purchases (50%).

At PCC, shoppers are closely reading labels on



The Non-GMO Project seal will appear on boxes of Nature's Path organic cereal beginning this summer.

products containing ingredients that may have been derived from genetically modified crops.

“People are really scrutinizing corn and soy ingredients in products, whether they are organic, non-organic or making non-GMO claims since those are the two crops that have the most contamination,” Bialic said.

Other shoppers may rely on a free “ShopNoGMO” iPhone app that includes a list of products across 22 categories that make GMO-free claims. The application was developed by The Institute for Responsible Technology’s Campaign for Healthier Eating for America so that shoppers seeking foods free of GM could shop more efficiently. Previously, the institute distributed paper lists in addition to the one that exists on its website, said Executive Director Jeffrey Smith.

“It’s a way for people to keep up-to-date with an ever-expanding list,” he said.

Soon the criteria for inclusion in ShopNoGMO will be more selective as it transitions to foods bearing the Non-GMO Project seal.

“We’ve been waiting for enough products to be enrolled and verified before we make the transition,” said Smith. “It’s the new standard being adopted by the industry.” **SN**

## GROUPS OPPOSE LABELING POSITION

A PROPOSED U.S. POSITION on food labeling could create problems for producers wishing to identify items as GMO-free. That’s according to *Consumer Reports* publisher Consumer Union and more than 80 farmer, public health, environmental and organic food organizations who expressed their concern in a letter sent last month to the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The group takes specific issue with a U.S. draft position paper that states that mandatory labeling of GM foods “is likely to create the impression that the labeled food is in some way different” and would therefore be “false, misleading or deceptive.”

Consumer Union, the Organic Trade Organization and others who signed the letter contend that referring to GM labeling as “false, misleading and deceptive” contradicts the rationale that allows for voluntary labeling of GM foods in the U.S.

“A voluntary label that says non-GE would be illegal by that reasoning, even though current regulations permit it,” Michael Hansen, senior scientist at Consumer Union, told *SN*.

The U.S. position was taken in response to a Codex document stating that countries can adopt different approaches to the labeling of GE foods. Codex is a United Nations agency that develops food safety and labeling standards which are used to settle disputes at the World Trade Organization. The Codex Committee on Food Labeling met in Quebec City to discuss the issue earlier this month.

— J.G.

# Program Turns Trash to Cash

Continued from Page 26

recycle. It is also important to provide a market for recycled materials and product, or the act of recycling cannot be sustainable," said Simon.

While the bags are not a category leader, they were not meant to be. Rather, they are sold to cater to environmentally conscious customers who want to take

that extra step.

"They are a good example of the variety of products offered at Schnucks," Simon said.

Despite being around for years, the program is growing in popularity due to the increased attention on the environment, according to WasteZero's Currie.

"The whole marketplace

is more environmentally friendly," Currie said.

H-E-B, for instance, promoted the bags in April as part of a larger Earth Day event. In the seven years that H-E-B has sold Enviro-Bags, it has helped recycle 12 tons of plastic bags, according to Currie.

"Don't throw away those plastic grocery bags," H-E-B writes in promotional materials. "Your school can sign up to collect H-E-B plastic grocery bags and earn money for every pound you accumulate. The bags you collect are then turned into trash bags, which can be purchased at H-E-B."

The program has raised over \$1.5 million for schools. All monies are paid to schools under the retailer's name.

"It's great public relations for retailers because they're giving back to the community," Currie said.

## THE PROCESS

**SAN ANTONIO** — H.E. Butt Grocery's website provides a step-by-step description of how plastic shopping bags are recycled into trash bags sold in its stores. According to its website:

1. Groceries are purchased at H-E-B and bagged with plastic bags. The bags are saved by students and community members and brought to a participating school.
2. Once at the school, the bags are rolled tightly and packed into shipping liners. The heavier the liners, the more dollars for the school.
3. Once the schools' recycling liners are full, they're mailed to Enviro-Bag, where the contents are weighed, sorted and graded on cleanliness. A report card is sent to the school, telling them how much the liners weighed and how much money they earned.
4. A machine grinds H-E-B plastic bags into tiny plastic pellets.
5. Pellets are sent through an extrusion machine where they are compressed, heated and flattened to make trash bags.
6. H-E-B Enviro-Bag trash bags are shipped to H-E-B stores, stocked on the shelves and made available for purchase.
7. H-E-B sells the bags in two stockkeeping units: 13-gallon drawstring tall kitchen bags, 20-count; and 30-gallon drawstring trash, 10-count. — C.A.

## ENVIRO-BAGS GET NEW LOOK AT TOPS

**WILLIAMSVILLE, N.Y.** — Tops Friendly Markets has redesigned its private-label Enviro-Bags.

Rolling out this month, the new packaging features the "School Recycling Program" logo more prominently.

Tops started selling Enviro-Bags in 2003, and changed them to its private label a year later. They are now called Tops Enviro-Bags. — C.A.



THE SUPERMARKET INDUSTRY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS  
**SUPERMARKETNEWS.COM**

Get everything supermarket,  
 as quick as you can click. From  
 Supermarket News, the industry's  
 leading and most valued  
 information resource.



**SN**  
 SUPERMARKET NEWS  
 smart. timely. preferred.