

# Wound up about round up

Certification outfits can declare products “glyphosate free,” but consumer awareness is not guaranteed

By Ilene Leichuk

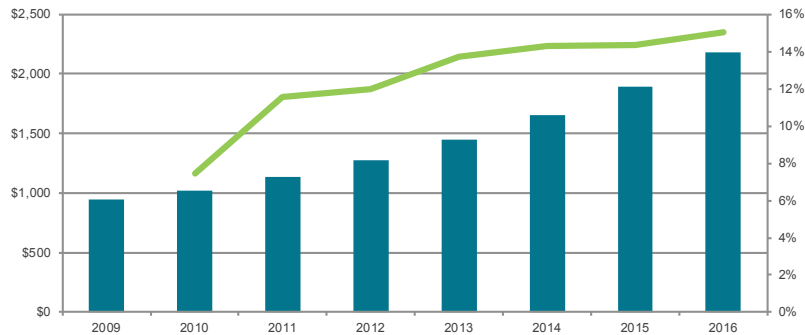
Keith Schlapkohl’s campaign for clean and transparent farming is as personal as it gets. The longtime Iowa corn and soybean farmer has watched the slow deterioration of his daughter’s health with the agonizing frustration of a parent who couldn’t figure out what was making his child sick—until he finally pinpointed modern agricultural practices. Some 20 years ago, when his daughter was nine, she began suffering in-

tense bouts of stomach upset, weight loss, and hives. Her symptoms continued, on and off, for years. At one point, she dropped to 85 pounds while in college. Eventually, Schlapkohl says, they discovered she was highly sensitive to pesticides—namely glyphosate, the world’s most heavily used herbicide and best known as the key ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup weed killer. Even if you try to eat only organic foods, he says, glyphosate can drift from conventional farms. It ends up in the water table. It can be in the livestock feed. Then it’s in the manure

## NBJ Takeaways

- » USDA Organic does not necessarily mean glyphosate-free
- » Two programs offer “glyphosate-free” seals
- » Awareness of glyphosate issues outside the natural food consumer base remains small
- » Wary industry figures worry new seal will confuse consumers

### WHOLE FOOD SUPPLEMENT SALES AND GROWTH, 2009-2016



Source: Nutrition Business Journal estimates (consumer sales)

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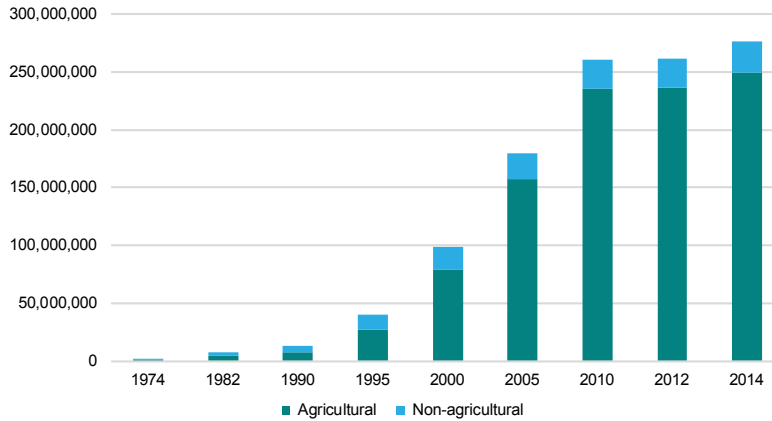
and in the fertilizer that ends up back on crops and in the soil, where it can reduce the availability of micronutrients to the plants. “My daughter is one of the reasons why over the last 10 years I’ve learned more about this than most people,” Schlapkohl explains. She also is the reason why Schlapkohl’s soybean crushing company, Heartland Crush, recently applied for and earned glyphosate-free certification. Heartland Crush, which produces meal for livestock, is on the cusp of the lat-

est push for glyphosate-free ingredients. Dozens of manufacturers and brands now are seeking out the non-glyphosate seal, offered separately by **BioChecked** and the **Detox Project**. Both certification programs started with soft launches: 2015 for BioChecked and in 2016 for the Detox Project. They publicly launched with more fanfare in 2017. Approximately 35 brands have earned the “Non Glyphosate Certified” seal from BioChecked so far, according to executive Scott

Prentice. BioChecked is the largest independently owned third-party certification company in the U.S. and best known for its non-GMO label.

The Detox Project, meanwhile, has endorsed about 18 brands as “Glyphosate Residue Free.” Another 50 brands are in the midst of the certification process, says director Henry Rowlands. In April, The Detox Project also launched a “Gold Standard” certification for products and supplements promising to flush toxins from the body—a multi-billion dollar not-fully-regulated market. The first product certified was **Purium’s** Biome Medic, proving in clinical trials that its product can reduce glyphosate traces by more than 74 percent. Three more brands are currently applying for this new certification, according to Rowlands.

GLYPHOSATE ACTIVE INGREDIENT USE IN THE U.S.



Source: Environmental Sciences Europe (28:3)

“There’s a whole new level of education,” for both producers and consumers, Rowlands says. “This will certainly become an industry standard. The market is moving toward more toxic chemical labeling.”

**Demanding details**

The non-glyphosate certification process is similar for both organizations. Applicants hire a third-party IOS certified lab to test their products. (The Detox Project’s clients have used AGQ Laboratories in Oxnard, California, and

that consumers really, deeply care.” For now, these certifications serve a niche market—foods and supplements that appeal to the eco-educated natural foods crowd. For a broader market, wary industry watchers worry these add-on labels might confuse average consumers, who barely understand the difference between the non-GMO and USDA Organic labels. So why are interested parties predicting big growth in glyphosate-free certification? For some producers, it’s about brand differentiation in a competitive marketplace and

of least-sprayed produce. (Conventional avocados also cost half the price of organic.) “For the consumer who is really concerned about organic and about trace pesticides, especially glyphosate, there is no other way for us to put a positioning statement on the front of our packaging that tells the consumer this product is free of pesticides,” Morse says.

Indeed, consumers are demanding more transparency and assurance. A 2014 Consumer Reports survey found that pesticides are a concern for 85 percent of Americans. It’s too soon to tell whether Glyphosate Residue Free certification will affect Chosen Foods’ sales and customer confidence. Avocado oil and spray bearing the new certification logo are just appearing in markets now. Labeled mayo products will hit shelves in July or August, Morse says.

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**Earth friendly**

Some brands seeking a glyphosate-free label also have a global do-gooder goal: educate farmers, manufacturers, and consumers about the persistent penetration of glyphosate throughout the food chain. And stop it.

“Certification is a jumping off point for us to help open people’s eyes,” says Bethany Davis, director of industry and regulatory affairs at MegaFood, whose entire line of dietary supplements was certified by The Detox Project. “It’s a lighthouse story. This is how one chemical affects our agricultural system and potentially affects our health.

“We are totally listening to and concerned with what is important to our consumers,” she adds. “At the same time, sometimes there are things we know about that we want to share as new information to our consumers. So, we really want to connect this soil health story to the nutrition story and help people understand how connected they are.” It’s a lofty goal, especially considering the current contentious climate. The global scientific community doesn’t agree about the dangers of glyphosate. Neither do government regulators. And Monsanto, which patented glyphosate as an herbicide in 1974 and planted the first genetically modified crops in 1987, has an

Anresco Laboratories in San Francisco, for example). Then BioChecked or The Detox Project evaluates the results. A product must have no detectable glyphosate or AMPA residues, down to 0.1 parts per billion. That’s a much tougher standard than the EPA’s “allowable level” of 30 ppb. The Detox Project requires two more tests throughout the certification year, plus spot checks. BioChecked conducts spot checks. The cost, not including third-party lab testing, starts around \$1,200. Clients say it’s a quick process, done in a matter of weeks. “I absolutely think it is worth the money,” Prentice of BioChecked says. “It’s worth it for the consumer confidence. There is just no doubt in my mind

assuring consumers who are worried about pesticides. And for others, it’s a crusade to bring about global change—literally saving the planet.

**Consumer confidence**

**Chosen Foods**, maker of avocado oils, sprays and vegan mayonnaise, applied for the Glyphosate Residue Free label from The Detox Project, in part, because its products don’t qualify for USDA Organic certification. All Chosen Foods’ ingredients are organic—except the main one. Natalie Morse, Chosen Foods marketing vice president, explains that San Diego-based Chosen Foods doesn’t use organic avocados because conventional avocados rank very high on the “Clean 15” list

army of scientists, lawyers, and lobbyists pushing back against proposed bans, warning labels and cancer lawsuits.

In 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic in humans." A year later, a joint committee of the WHO and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations stated glyphosate formulations don't necessarily constitute a health risk. Meanwhile, more than 300 lawsuits have been filed in federal court by farmers, landscapers, and gardeners against Monsanto, claiming that exposure to glyphosate caused non-Hodgkin lymphoma. The suits have been combined into a single case in federal court in California.

It's in this uncertain environment that more household foods, from orange juice to **Ben & Jerry's** Ice Cream, have tested positive for the controversial herbicide. In those cases, the amount of detectable glyphosate was far below the EPA's allowable level. But the findings were especially surprising for environmentally conscious Ben & Jerry's, which worked hard to source its plant-based ingredients from non-GMO farms that use no or fewer pesticides.

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- Henry Rowlands, *The Detox Project*

Glyphosate opponents say such findings demonstrate how pervasive the herbicide is in the food chain. There are researchers who say glyphosate impacts soil health, alters its complex system of bacteria, fungi and minerals, and halts plants' ability to access nutrients.

"We are calling it a nutritional crisis," says Davis of MegaFood. "People are

eating more than ever but getting less nutrition than ever. We know that without healthy soil, there cannot be healthy people. If we kill the soil, we are killing the planet." Can one more little certification seal really spark a broad public discussion and global change? Davis thinks so.

"On Twitter a couple of weeks ago, I saw that somebody tweeted about our new cap sticker. They said they didn't under-

certification is necessary.

"There may be a market demand out there for it, but I would think it would be a tiny slice," Hoffman says. He worries that one more certification label will confuse consumers and muddy the already convoluted organic program. "The consumer still thinks the non-GMO seal might be more healthy than organic," he says, referring to the

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stand what glyphosate was so they Googled it and was like 'Holy moly this is really important! We should be paying attention!' To me, that's cool to see someone learned

fact that non-GMO certified foods can be grown with pesticides. "And, plus, people can't even pronounce glyphosate." Predictions about the future popularity of glyphosate certifications vary. Morse of Chosen Foods doesn't expect non-glyphosate certification to show up in conventional markets anytime soon, but Whole Foods shoppers should expect to see many more brands bearing a label.

"If it has a very minimal cost to the brand, I don't see any reason why people won't jump at the opportunity to use this as another layer of transparency," she says.

Rowlands of The Detox Project says the certification's future depends on whether organic labeling standards in the U.S. improve and apply to the entire supply chain. If that happens, an add-on glyphosate certification might not be necessary anymore.

Schlapkohl, for all his personal experience with glyphosate, says the industry still has a lot to learn about being glyphosate-free. "We are still 5-10 years ahead of the curve," he says. 🌱

something from our label and shared it. We can't do this on our own. We are literally trying to save the planet. We need as many people as possible to do this with us."

#### Caution advised

Steve Hoffman, industry consultant and principal of marketing firm **Compass Natural**, isn't convinced non-glyphosate