



ETC Group
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Organic Pioneer says No to Nano

ETC Group Welcomes World's First 'Nano-free' Standard

Now that you can drive your 'nano' car, listening to your iPod 'nano' while wearing 'nano' sunscreen and 'nano' clothing, the UK's largest organic certifier has just introduced the perfect nano-antidote – a 'nano-free' standard for consumer products. The Soil Association – one of the world's pioneers of organic agriculture – announced today that it has banned human-made nanomaterials from the organic cosmetics, foods and textiles that it certifies. (1)

According to the U.S.-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, there are over 500 manufacturer-identified consumer products on the market that contain nanomaterials. However, since manufacturers are not required to disclose the presence of nano-scale materials, it's virtually impossible for people to make fully informed choices. In its newly published standard, the Soil Association bans the use of human-made nanomaterials whose basic particle size is less than 125nm and whose mean particle size is less than 200nm. While the Soil Association's ban only affects organic production for goods certified in the UK, other organic certifiers worldwide are expected to follow suit.

“We welcome this sensible move by the Soil Association and encourage other certifiers, companies and governments to follow their lead,” said Jim Thomas of ETC Group. “A decade ago the Soil Association led the way in creating a safe alternative to GM crops when they declared organic production to be GM-free and now they are trailblazing again – acting to protect the public from potential risks of engineered nanoparticles.” In 2003 ETC Group first called for a moratorium on nanotechnology research until governments adopt agreed-upon safety standards and regulatory oversight.

Despite a flood of commercial nanotech products and a paucity of studies on the health, safety and environmental impacts of nano-scale materials, the regulatory vacuum persists today. A 2007 survey by 15 governments estimates there are at least 70 nanotech food-related applications already on the market. According to Helmut Kaiser Consultancy, the nanotechnology market for food and food processing could reach \$20.4 billion by 2010, and most major food and beverage corporations are investing in nanotech R&D.

Trailblazers

The Soil Association has a long history of safeguarding food and agricultural products from potential threats. In 1967 they published the world's first organic standard explicitly banning pesticides, antibiotics and other chemicals from organic farming. In 1983 they banned animal protein from animal feed 3 years before the first case of BSE (mad cow disease) was discovered

in Britain. In 1994 they banned GM crops from food and farming – five years before the UK food industry followed suit. In the wake of the Soil Association’s ‘no-nano’ decision other organic agriculture groups in North America and Europe are now examining whether to ban nanomaterials from their organic standards as well.

A Nano-Free Symbol

A year ago ETC Group announced the result of its graphic design competition for a universal warning symbol for nanotech that could be used in workplaces and on products. (3) The Soil Association have gone one better. Their certification mark is now effectively the world’s first nano-free symbol. It is already found on over 80% of organic products that are sold in the UK (4)

Growing Concerns

The Soil Association ban comes in the same month that the UK’s largest consumer association, *Which?* (<http://www.which.co.uk/>) will launch its campaign to protect the public from risky nanomaterials in consumer products, following the lead of the US Consumers Union which has called for mandatory labeling, regulatory oversight and increased funding for risk-related research.(5) It also follows growing annoyance in civil society that repeated warnings over nanotech safety risks are being ignored by nano-boosting governments. In mid-2007 over 40 civil society groups endorsed a statement of principles calling for precautionary action, manufacturer liability and new nano-specific regulations for nano-products. (6) To date no government has enacted legislation to assess the safety or societal impacts of nanomaterials.

Notes to editors:

(1) For more information about the Soil Association’s new nanotech standard, contact the Soil Association’s Media Officer Clio Turton in the UK +44 (0)117 914 2448 or +44 (0)7795 562 556 or email cturton@soilassociation.org

(2) The Woodrow Wilson Center nanotech consumer product inventory is online at <http://www.nanotechproject.org/inventories/consumer/>

(3) Details of the winning Nanohazard warning symbol from ETC Group’s 2007 design competition are at http://www.etcgroup.org/en/materials/publications.html?pub_id=604

(4) The Soil Association’s certification mark is visible at http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sacert/sacertweb.nsf/B3/why_certify_with_us.html

(5) *Which?* UK-based consumer organization nanotech campaign mentioned http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/technology/technology.html?in_page_id=1965&in_article_id=505561

(6) Principles for the Oversight of Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials (developed by broad coalition of civil society, public interest, environmental and labour organizations): <http://tiny.cc/azFEi>

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