

ORGANIC FARMER GROUP Dumps ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION



OSGATA Cites Betrayal Over Monsanto-Backed

GMO LABELING BILL

Washington, ME, July 13, 2016 – By a unanimous vote of its Board of Directors, the organic farmer-controlled *Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA)* has withdrawn its membership from the *Organic Trade Association (OTA)*. OSGATA’s decision was prompted by *OTA*’s duplicity towards organic farmers and consumers when a small number of *OTA* board members endorsed a dangerous Senate bill that would immediately preempt existing strong state GMO Labeling laws that are widely supported by the Organic community and ninety percent of consumers.

Biotech giant [Monsanto is universally recognized within the Organic community as organic’s greatest threat](#). Recent revelations have made clear that the *OTA* has created numerous close [partnerships with Monsanto](#) including intensive [lobbying efforts by the notorious biotech-linked lobbyist Podesta Group on behalf of the deal brokered by Senators Stabenow \(D-MI\) and Roberts \(R-KS\)](#). The Stabenow-Roberts (S.764) is a Senate bill – backed by industrial agriculture and large food conglomerates and whose primary intent are nullifying of historic mandatory GMO Labeling laws passed by huge margins in Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and Alaska legislatures and relieving multinational food companies of the requirement to clearly label products that were produced by genetic engineering. *OTA* support for the Monsanto-backed bill proved essential for passage. Last week Stabenow-Roberts passed in the Senate by a narrow four-vote margin of victory on a vote of 63-30.

“It’s important for the world to understand that it was the *Organic Trade Association* that killed our state GMO labeling laws by backing Monsanto’s Stabenow-Roberts bill,” said Maine organic seed farmer and longtime *OSGATA* President, Jim Gerritsen. “It’s clear that *Organic Trade Association* has come under the control of a small group of lobbyists controlled by giant-

food corporations that also own organic brands. In an effort to protect their own bottom lines and those of their parent companies, the reckless actions of these large parent-owned organic companies threaten the survival of organic farmers and the organic community we have all worked so hard for decades to build. The *Organic Trade Association* can no longer be trusted and it's clear that organic farmers can no longer condone this dubious trade association's troubling behavior. Effective immediately, the farmer-run organic seed trade group *OSGATA* resigns from *OTA* and we call on other honest organic organizations and companies to do the same."

OTA's efforts in support of the industry-backed bill included misleading assertions made to its membership and the public about what the bill would accomplish. These assertions included false statements that the bill will require mandatory disclosure of GMO ingredients nationwide and would cover thousands more products than Vermont's and other states' GMO labeling laws. The *FDA*, *Consumers Union*, and numerous others have pointed out that the bill's definitions, ambiguities, lack of penalty authority, and other provisions fail to guarantee on-package product transparency.

Further, *OTA*'s efforts had the intentional effect of misleading Senators into believing the bill had the full backing of the organic industry when [the truth was the exact opposite](#). The *OSGATA* Board of Directors has terminated *OTA*'s membership in *OSGATA* due to violations of *OSGATA*'s Code of Ethics. *OSGATA*'s Code of Ethics requires that members refrain from false or misleading statements to the public and/or conduct that brings discredit on *OSGATA* or himself/herself. See, *OSGATA Bylaws, Article 8 – Code of Ethics*.

"*OSGATA* is a well-respected farmer-run membership trade organization dedicated to protecting and developing organic seed for organic farmers around the world" said Lisa Stokke, *OSGATA* Board officer and representative from *OSGATA*-member *Food Democracy Now!* based in Iowa. "*OTA*'s devious actions constitute serious violations of our *Code of Ethics* and dictated that *OSGATA* immediately terminate their membership. *OSGATA*'s withdrawal from *OTA* and their termination of membership serves to completely sever *OSGATA* from any further destructive actions by the *OTA* and the handful of dishonest corporate lobbyists that falsely represented the organic industry to our elected officials in Washington DC. It's important to us that Congress and the public understand that *OTA*'s values and interests do not match nor represent that of the Organic community, including organic family farmers and the millions of organic consumers who purchase more than \$40 billion of organic food annually based on a relationship of trust, openness and transparency."

OSGATA had been a member of *OTA* for eight years. *OSGATA*'s members had become distressed in recent years over *OTA*'s increasingly divisive behavior on many issues important to organic farmers. In 2015, by a unanimous vote of its membership, *OSGATA* members voted to vigorously oppose *OTA*'s proposal for an involuntary tax on organic farmers, known as the "Organic Checkoff". *OTA* continues to misrepresent its Organic Checkoff proposal to federal officials as having widespread support among organic farmers. *OTA*'s false assertions have been [strongly challenged by a growing army of vocal opponents](#).

OSGATA gained notoriety in 2011 when it became lead plaintiff in the landmark federal lawsuit, [OSGATA et al v. Monsanto](#), in which organic farmers and their allies fought to challenge the validity of Monsanto's transgenic seed patents and sought court protection for farmers from potential Monsanto patent infringement litigation should Monsanto's patented seed trespass onto and contaminate their organic crops. The *U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit* in Washington, D.C., rewarded farmers with a partial victory when it held that Monsanto is judicially estopped from suing any farmer whose crops inadvertently become contaminated by trace amounts of Monsanto's patented seed technology.

“In *OSGATA et al v. Monsanto*, we showed we weren't afraid to stand up to the biggest patent bully on the face of the planet,” said farmer and *OSGATA* board member, Lyn Howe of Beach Road Farm in Hawaii and acting Director for Hawaii Seed Growers Network. “Now that it's become clear *OTA* has teamed up with Monsanto and is endangering everything that we believe in, this is the last straw. It's high time we leave *OTA* behind and join and work with others who understand organic farming is the right way to farm and the wave of the future.”

Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association

OSGATA is a farmer-controlled national non-profit membership trade organization of certified organic farmers, certified organic seed companies, organic seed professionals, affiliate organizations and individuals dedicated to the advancement of certified organic seed. *OSGATA* is committed to protecting, promoting and developing the organic seed trade and its growers, thereby assuming that the organic community has access to excellent quality certified organic seed, free of genetic contaminants and adapted to the diverse needs of local organic agriculture.