

# San Francisco Examiner

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## Waiter, there's a genetically altered tomato in my soup!

### Top local chefs join boycott of new biotech foods

**T**HE biotechnology food fight is on. At least Jeremy Rifkin says so, and he's got an army of chefs at the ready to hurl arugula, Niman Schell beef and chocolate truffles at even the thought of genetically engineered foods.

More than 140 Bay Area chefs have signed on to a boycott of biotech foods and are asking the government for pre-market testing, registration and clear labeling of them. The group includes the stellar core of Bay Area restaurants and such household names as Jeremiah Tower of Stars, Alice Waters of Chez Panisse and Joyce Goldstein of Square One.

The chefs say they won't serve the foods, and many have agreed to display a decal saying so — the double helix in a circle with a slash through it — on menus and in their windows. They are joining 1,500

chefs nationally who are part of the campaign.

"To me, it is important to serve food that is totally healthy," said Julian Serrano, chef at Masa's. "I think it's a better idea for there to be more control on the food, and for it to be less risky."

Rifkin has battled the biotechnology industry for many years,

**SALLY  
LEHRMAN  
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BIOTECH**

with campaigns against a genetically engineered milk booster called bovine growth hormone, certain human gene therapy experiments

and the testing of human growth hormone in children with no deficiency of the substance.

This time he says he intends to shut food biotechnology down, beginning with a high-tech tomato Calgene expects to sell next year and extending even to creations that biotechnology executives say

[ See BIOTECH, B-4 ]

## Local chefs join food boycott

will contribute to pesticide-free farming.

"We're determined to defeat the biotechnology industry in food," Rifkin says. "It will go the way of nuclear power but much more decisively. It is environmentally unsound and goes against the trend toward sustainable living."

Rifkin and other consumer advocates argue that regulators were too lax by deciding to treat most biotech products no differently from any other foods. They point out concerns about religious dietary restrictions, food allergies and unknown health effects. And they worry about the environmental impact of whole farms growing gene-altered plants.

The biotech industry argues that any potential safety problems will be uncovered in regular field trials and a regulatory process that helps to identify potential health problems. Executives try to point out the potential benefits of their work: more food, better-tasting food, alternatives to pesticides.

Rifkin says his group has chosen California to launch a national boycott because of the huge agriculture industry here as well as the high consumer awareness of food safety. In addition, the state is home to Calgene, a Davis company that is likely to be first in the market in 1993 with its Flavr Savr tomato engineered to have a long shelf life. Other whole biotech foods are likely to follow soon after.

Already, genetically engineered enzymes are used in food processing. Almost half of the cheese made in the United States is produced using a dairy enzyme, according to the Industrial Biotechnology Association.

"I think if the tomato makes it, it's going to open up the floodgates," Rifkin said. "We want a clear, clarion call out across this country . . . that the American public is not going to accept genetically engineered foods."

The Pure Food Campaign was launched at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in the middle of the Newspaper



EXAMINER/1988

**Square One's Joyce Goldstein has joined the gene-altered food fight.**

"I don't think God made tomatoes to sit around for 12 weeks. They're a work of art; they're meant to be eaten."

—Joyce Goldstein, owner and chef of Square One

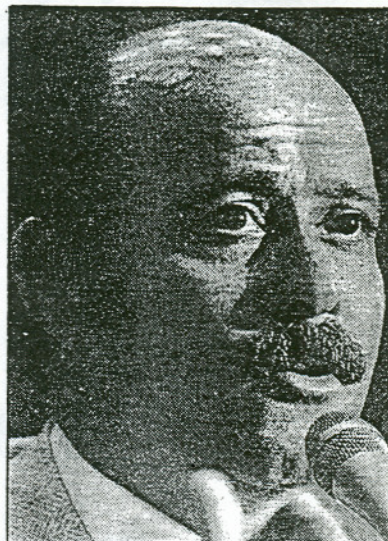
Food Editors and Writers Annual Conference, although it wasn't on the program. As many chefs as reporters attended the press conference.

Diane Goodman, director of Pure Food California, said she would ask growers, processors, distributors, restaurants and consumers to wipe their hands of genetic engineering.

"We hope we will see (the decal) on every refrigerator in the United States next year," Rifkin said.

If there were any biotech industry representatives in the room, they didn't speak up. Calgene has decided instead to concentrate on test marketing of vine-ripened tomatoes while touting the new varieties' flavor in trade magazines.

"It's pretty hard to attack most of that stuff and pretty unproductive," said Stephen Benoit, vice president of marketing at Calgene Fresh, the subsidiary that will sell the tomato. Restaurants make up



AP/1988

**Jeremy Rifkin says he intends to shut down biotech food industry.**

about half his potential market.

He said Calgene had already pledged to do what the chefs had asked. The company has performed safety tests and has asked regulators to pronounce the tomatoes safe. The produce will be marked "Flavr Savr," which the public now knows means genetically engineered, Benoit argued. And, he said, the company will monitor quality.

In general, biotech companies have been quiet in the face of Rifkin's attack. The Industrial Biotechnology Association says it is putting together an educational brochure to send to the press and whoever else wants it. Individual companies are likely to wait until they have a product ready to sell, said industry consultant David Glass in Boston.

"The industry does need to do something to get its viewpoint into the public discussion," Glass said. "My guess is that it's such an enormous task that it's too daunting to even take on."

Calgene has compiled 3,000 newspaper articles on the subject, checked with close to 25 focus groups and decided that a public debate wouldn't be fruitful.

"Basically what we have is a public favorably predisposed toward new products if they deliver value," Benoit said. "I'm happy to be judged that way."

*Inside Biotech appears Thursday. Sally Lehrman reports on biotechnology and health care for The Examiner.*