

The Foundation on Economic Trends

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CONSUMERS LAUNCH NATIONWIDE PROTESTS AGAINST USDA'S WEAKENING OF "NATIONAL ORGANIC FOOD STANDARDS"

PICKET LINES AND PROTESTS IN FRONT OF NATURAL FOOD STORES BEGIN THURSDAY TO DEMAND EXCLUSION FROM ORGANIC LABEL OF GENETIC ENGINEERING AND FACTORY FARM PRODUCTION METHODS

FOUNDATION ON ECONOMIC TRENDS LAUNCHES NATIONWIDE "SOS" CAMPAIGN TO SAVE ORGANIC STANDARDS

Washington, D.C.--Jeremy Rifkin's Foundation on Economic Trends today announced the beginning of a new national consumer campaign against the USDA's proposed federal regulations on organic foods. Over the objections of the National Organics Standards Board, natural food retailers, processors, and organic farmers the USDA will not prohibit the use of genetic engineering under new federal organic regulations released Dec. 15. The proposed USDA regulations also fail to prohibit other controversial agricultural practices such as factory farm intensive confinement of animals; spreading toxic sewage sludge and industrial wastes on farm lands and pastures; feeding diseased and waste animal body parts, offal, manure, and blood to farm animals; and using radioactive nuclear wastes to irradiate food products. In addition the proposed federal laws will make it illegal for organic producers and retailers to uphold and promote organic standards which are stricter than the minimal standards required by the USDA.

In response to the USDA proposal, the Foundation on Economic Trends' Pure Food Campaign has begun to organize a nationwide campaign called "SOS" or Save Organic Standards. On Thursday, December 18 consumer activists will launch this campaign with picket lines and protests in front of natural food supermarkets in major U.S. cities including Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and New York City.

The SOS campaign will mobilize natural food consumers, hundreds of natural food stores and consumer coops, organic farmers, chefs, public interest organizations, and natural food processors, wholesalers, and manufacturers. SOS will initially organize in-store counter displays in hundreds of natural food stores across the country as part of a letter-writing campaign directed toward the USDA during the official "90-day comment period" that will extend between Dec. 16 and March 16. The SOS effort will also include public education forums, picket lines in front of USDA offices, leafletting of supermarkets that sell organic foods, and, if necessary, litigation.

"Genetic engineering and factory farming are totally incompatible with organic agriculture. We will organize a mass movement of consumers, retailers, and farmers to save organic standards," stated Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends.

"Once again the USDA has betrayed consumers and farmers," said Ronnie Cummins, director of the FET's Pure Food Campaign. "Unless these standards are strengthened, consumers may lose faith in the organics level. We must not allow agribusiness factory farms and chemical and genetic engineering companies to take over a \$4 billion dollar industry which has so painstakingly been built up by natural food consumers, farmers, and retailers over the past three decades," Cummins concluded.

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