



Support GMO labeling

Pass the state bill; kill the bill in Washington

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Two bills, one in the Massachusetts Legislature and one in the U.S. Senate, are coming at the issue of labeling food products with genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, from different directions.

House Bill 3242 has the support of more than 150 Massachusetts legislators and sits in the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. It aims to establish the requirement that food labels in the commonwealth indicate the presence of GMO ingredients.

In Washington, House Resolution 1599, passed in the House about four weeks ago, takes the opposite view: It prohibits states from enacting labeling laws, and also prohibits the Food and Drug Administration from establishing a national GMO labeling requirement. That bill is now in the Senate.

Without addressing at this time the clearly pertinent issue of the safety of GMO foods, we would urge our state legislators and U.S. senators to vote on their respective bills in favor of transparency for the consumer: Pass the state bill, and sink the one in the U.S. Senate.

There is a fog of public relations literature promoting the opposite position about the cost of implementing a labeling law and its impact on food prices, lack of popular support for labeling and the safety of GMO foods. In 64 other countries around the world (the only developed countries without the labeling requirement are the U.S. and Canada), GMO labeling has been implemented without raising food costs, not unlike the nutrition labeling required in the U.S. decades ago.

Numerous polls show overwhelming popular support of GMO labeling. And safety of GMO foods can't be determined in large populations, because labeling hasn't been done.

One anti-labeling message that has successfully spread into popular acceptance is the claim that humans have been genetically modifying food for thousands of years. Intentionally

misleading or not, this talking point improperly equates field-based cross-pollination with transgenic breeding, that is, combining the DNA of one species with another. GMO foods have been engineered in laboratories to include the DNA of bacteria that kill pests and resist weed killers. While a recent report shows sweet potatoes worldwide have had DNA bacterium present in them naturally for 8,000, the issue is not about safety, but about transparency.

One difference between naturally occurring sweet potatoes and the human-engineered corn, soybeans, wheat and other staples currently growing in the U.S. is the creation of resistant insects and weeds being selected. Just as hand-sanitizers have helped create stubborn super bugs that inhabit hospitals across the country, our tinkering with evolutionary processes has accelerated nature's response and prompted the GMO industries to explore more potent genes to combine with the plants.

These concerns are not raised as an objection to GMO foods, but merely as reasons to demand transparency. We would urge our state and federal legislators to vote on the side of disclosure when these bills are considered, and urge our readers to send lawmakers the same message.

We would also expect that the Food and Drug Administration should begin widespread, rigorous testing of GMO foods to determine their safety.

We have yet to see any worthwhile argument that labeling isn't in the best interest of consumers.

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