



Why Vermonters Want GMO Labeling

Vermonters are concerned about the uncertainties surrounding GMO foods (also known as GE foods, GM foods, or genetically engineered foods). Vermont has a great opportunity right now to step up and lead the way on this issue. Vermonters want to know what is in their food, and with H.112 we have a chance to get important information on the label so we can decide what we want to eat and what we don't want to eat. We take food seriously here, and we hope our legislators will seriously consider this critical legislation that will give Vermonters the information we deserve and need to make informed decisions about what we feed our families.

Talking Points on H.112

The Vermont Genetically Engineered Food Labeling Act

In Vermont, we take food seriously. Vermonters want to know where their food comes from, and how it is made. For many, this means growing their own food. The next best option is to buy directly from a farmer that we know, so we can ask questions about how the food was grown or raised and whether or not GMOs were used. Vermonters want to know these things because some of us have health concerns about GMOs, and some of us have environmental concerns.

Vermonters want to do their best to make sure they are making the best choices to align their purchases with their values. Sometimes, though, our busy lives mean that we have to buy food at the grocery store. When at the grocery store, we sometimes get frustrated because we can't get the information we need to make good decisions for our families, and sometimes, even when we think we are making good decisions, we find out later that the information we got or didn't get was deceiving. Mandatory GMO labeling will give Vermonters the information we need to make informed choices at the grocery store.

We Just Want the Facts – Consumers have concerns about what is in food, and we especially want to know if GMOs are in our food. Some of us have health concerns about GMOs because there is no scientific consensus that they are safe, and some of us have environmental concerns about GMOs. Vermonters want to be able to make food choices that align with our personal and family values. We all want to make good decisions for our families, no matter our background or income level. We may not agree on the best food choices, but we all want to make the choice that we think is best for our families. At the grocery store, the label is the link to making those choices, and the label should have the accurate, factual information we need to decide.

It's Not a Big Deal to Label GMOs – There is a lot of important information already on the label. For instance, we can find out if there is gluten or allergens in the food item, or how much fat and calories there are in a serving of the food item. When food producers change their recipes or their branding, they can easily change the label on the product. We see this all the time. It's no big deal to change a label.

It's not a big deal for a business to change a label for a food item. Food producers do this whenever a recipe is changed, a product is sourced from a different place, or when they want to highlight a specific characteristic that consumers care about. This is just a cost of doing business, and as long as they know what the rules are, it's not a big deal.

"Natural" Has a Dirty Little Secret – Attaching the word "natural" to something that can never occur in nature, like GMOs, is fundamentally deceiving. Vermonters need our legislators to act as quickly as possible to make sure that "natural" cannot mean "made with GMOs." How can we make good decisions for our families when words have different meanings just because they are on food labels? Vermonters need clarity and consistency in food labeling in order to make informed decisions. H.112 would require the labeling of foods produced with genetic engineering sold in the state of Vermont. The bill would also prohibit genetically engineered food from being advertised as "natural," "naturally made," "naturally grown," "all natural," or any other similar words that would tend to mislead the consumer.

Why Should Vermont Label Genetically Engineered Foods?

What is genetically engineered (GE) food? – Genetically engineered foods (often called genetically modified organisms or GMOs) are produced by means of laboratory techniques that insert genetic material (DNA) from diverse species of plants, animals, viruses, and/or bacteria, into the DNA of other plants or animals creating new organisms that could not occur in nature.

What foods contain genetically engineered ingredients? – Genetically engineered ingredients are found in approximately 70-80% of all processed foods in the United States. The major genetically engineered crops in this country are corn, cotton, soy, sugar beets and canola, which are found in the majority of processed foods.

Studies show that there are reasons to be concerned about eating GE foods. – There is no scientific consensus on the safety of GMO foods.¹ Contrary to industry-funded research, a growing body of international research has documented potential risks to human health. GMO pesticides have been found in the blood and urine of animals and humans.^{1,3,4} Controlled feeding studies have documented health effects of GMO diets on the immune system, gastrointestinal tract, liver and other organ systems in mice, rats and pigs.^{1,2} To date, further investigation of these and other research findings by independent scientists have not been funded and carried out.^{1,2} These studies clearly demonstrate that current safety testing and regulation of GMO foods by the FDA and the EPA are inadequate and need to be strengthened.⁵

Without labeling it is difficult to track the health effects of GE foods. – Labeling would give the state the ability to track any effects these foods might be having on the health of Vermonters, and to better understand the possible threats that these foods pose.

GMO crops have led to increased pesticide use. – A study based on USDA data found that from 1996-2008 there was a 318.4 million pound increase in pesticide use in the United States. When averaged out, this equals an extra quarter pound of pesticide for every acre of GMO crops planted over the first 13 years of commercial use.⁶

We have the right to know. Label GMOs NOW.

The world is labeling GMOs. Vermont can lead the way for the U.S. – Not only have 64 countries already required that foods with GMOs be labeled, large retailers are starting to say that this will be a requirement to sell in their stores. For instance, Whole Foods will require all foods sold in their stores to either be GMO-free or be labeled by 2018. Vermont needs to lead the way as a state and require that GMO foods be labeled.

There is broad support for GMO food labeling. – Over 30,000 Vermonters have signed postcards asking their senators to label GMO foods, and polls have shown that over 90% of Americans and Vermonters want to see genetically engineered foods labeled.^{7,8} Genetically engineered foods are labeled in over 64 countries worldwide including the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and China.

1 - European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER), *No scientific consensus on GMO safety*, 21 October 2013.

2 - Jose Domingo and J. Bordonaba, *A literature review on the safety assessment of genetically modified plants*, 37 Environment International 734-742 (2011).

3 - Aziz Aris & Samuel Leblanc, *Maternal and fetal exposure to pesticides associated to genetically modified foods in Eastern Townships of Quebec, Canada*. *Reprod Toxicol*. 31 May 2011.

4 - Friends of The Earth Europe, *Weed killer found in human urine across Europe*, <http://www.foeeurope.org/weed-killer-glyphosate-found-human-urine-across-Europe-130613>.

5 - William Freese and David Schubert. *Safety Testing and Regulation of Genetically Engineered Foods*. 21 Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Reviews, November 2004.

6 - Benbrook CM. *Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the United States: The first thirteen years*, The Organic Center, November 2009.

7 - Center for Food Safety, *Polls on GMO Labeling*, <http://gefoodlabels.org/gmo-labeling/polls-on-gmo-labeling/>.

8 - 2002 Vermonter Poll, *Vermonters Report Overwhelming Support for Labeling of GMO Food Products*, UVM Center for Rural Studies, March 6, 2002. <http://www.uvm.edu/crs/?Page=reports/report.html&SM=reports/reportssubmenu.html>

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