



2014-15 Sophomore Writing Assessment

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Battle Out West Over Food Labeling

The Los Angeles Times 10/27/14



A grocery store employee wipes down a soup bar with a display informing customers of organic, GMO-free oils, in Boulder, Colorado, Oct. 23, 2014. With ballot measures going to a vote in November, Colorado and Oregon could become the first states to adopt mandatory GMO (genetically modified organism) labels through public votes. Photo: AP Photo/Brennan Linsley

Voters in two Western states are caught in fierce battles over whether genetically modified food must be labeled.

On Nov. 4, Oregon and Colorado will decide the fate of labeling laws for genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. A GMO is any plant or animal that has been genetically modified, or somehow changed with outside DNA. Companies say that genetically modifying crops or food animals is a useful way to increase yield or provide protection against disease.

Most processed foods in the United States, like canned soup, soda and frozen meals, contain some GMOs. Foods like peanut butter, wheat bread, milk, cheese, fruits and vegetables generally do not.

Election Day Decision

Voters will see questions on their November voting ballots — Measure 92 in Oregon and Proposition 105 in Colorado — that call for labeling food so that buyers know whether they contain ingredients that have been genetically changed in any way.

The states could become the first to pass this kind of referendum, or public vote. Washington state and California rejected similar proposals in 2013 and 2012, respectively, after expensive campaigns. Lawmakers in Vermont approved the labeling, but the issue is still being fought in the courts.

The referendums pit groups of foodies, organic farmers and nutrition activists against many of the nation's leading manufacturers. These include the biotechnology company Monsanto, Kraft Foods and Coca-Cola. Large grocery chains and some farmers have joined the fight against the labeling.

Fear Of The Unknown Labeling Effect

Opponents fear labeling will brand their products as bad and make them less desirable, because people will think they are unhealthy. They also say labeling will make products more expensive for consumers.

Those in favor of the labels argue that consumers are entitled to know whether their food contains GMOs. They say the information will allow people to make informed decisions about what they are buying.

The current GMO debate raises fears from previous GMO debates about whether there might be health problems from what some anti-GMO people call "Frankenfoods." That is ungrounded, say scientists who have studied the issue. A 2008 report by scientists from the National Academy of Sciences found no health problems associated with using GMOs.

The Wake-Up Vote

The current battle in Colorado reflects the positions from past fights over GMOs.

"What California really did was wake up the country," said Larry Cooper, co-chairman of Right to Know Colorado. Even though the California labeling vote lost, Cooper said the effort helped raise awareness on the issue.

In Colorado, the supporters of the labeling campaign are behind in raising money. Supporters raised \$700,000 versus an estimated \$12 million brought in by their opponents, many of them rich companies, Cooper said.

"It's definitely a David-versus-Goliath thing," he said.

"If they are so proud of GMOs, why would they be opposed" to a measure that advertises them on the label? Cooper asked.

Opponents of labeling argue that labeling could hurt the people they were designed to help.

A Labeling Alternative

Monsanto spokesman Thomas M. Henschler said the food company opposes state-by-state labeling laws, like the proposed laws in Oregon and Colorado. "The reason we don't support them is simple. They don't provide any safety or nutrition information, and these measures will hurt, not help, consumers, taxpayers and businesses. We support a federal approach which ensures food safety and consumer choice."

In Oregon, the ballot question has become the costliest in the state's history. As of the weekend, the two sides have raised \$16.7 million, the Portland Tribune reported. Monsanto has donated more than \$4 million to defeat Measure 92, it was reported. On the other side, the Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps company, which has supported similar labeling battles elsewhere, has given \$1.15 million.

And in a clever move to influence the public, Ben & Jerry's, the Vermont ice cream company that supports labeling, renamed its popular Chocolate Fudge Brownie flavor. The ice cream is now called Food Fight Fudge Brownie to raise awareness of the labeling battle.

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#1**

Labeling of Genetically Modified Foods

by P. Byrne, D. Pendell, & G. Graff, *Colorado State University*, October 2014

Quick Facts:

- Mandatory labeling of genetically modified (GM) foods has been proposed under a variety of initiatives at national and state levels but has not yet been implemented in the United States.
- Current U.S. law mandates food labeling when there is a substantial difference in the nutritional or safety characteristics of a new food. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USDA) does not consider the method of genetic engineering by itself to create such a difference.
- Companies may voluntarily label foods produced without genetic modification, and foods labeled USDA Organic are produced without genetic modification.

Whether or not to require labeling of food produced from crops that are genetically modified (GM) using recombinant DNA technology is a key issue in the ongoing debate over the risks and benefits of using biotechnology in agriculture. The U.S. government regulates GM food technologies, but once GM crops are approved they are considered to be 'substantially equivalent' to their conventional counterparts in terms of safety. Therefore, there is no federal requirement for labeling food that contains GM ingredients. Bills and ballot initiatives requiring mandatory labeling have been introduced and voted on in several states. The first states to have approved some form of mandatory labeling are Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont. Under U.S. law, companies may voluntarily label food products to inform consumers as to whether they do or do not contain ingredients from GM crops.

There are many arguments both for and against the mandatory labeling of GM foods. These arguments are summarized below.

Arguments Made in Support of Mandatory Labeling (Benefits)

- Consumers have a right to know what is in their food, especially concerning ingredients for which there may be health and environmental concerns
- Mandatory labeling will allow consumers to identify and steer clear of types of food products that they wish to avoid.
- For religious or ethical reasons, some Americans may want to avoid eating certain products that may be introduced by GM methods.
- Voluntary labeling has not been sufficient for informing consumers about the presence of GM ingredients.
- Surveys indicate that a majority of Americans support mandatory labeling.
- At least 64 countries have established some form of mandatory labeling .

Arguments Made Against Mandatory Labeling (Drawbacks)

- Labels on GM foods imply a warning about health effects, whereas no verifiable differences in health effects between GM and conventional foods have been detected .
- If a nutritional difference or allergenic characteristic were found in a GM food, current FDA regulations already require a label to that effect.

- Costs associated with labeling of GM foods would be borne broadly by most consumers in order to fulfill the desires of some consumers.
- Consumers who want to buy non-GM food already have options: to purchase verified non-GM foods or certified organic foods.
- Experience with mandatory labeling in the European Union, Japan, and New Zealand has not resulted in greater consumer choice. Rather, retailers have eliminated GM products from their shelves due to perceived consumer aversion to GM products.
- The food system infrastructure (storage, processing, and transportation facilities) in this country could not currently accommodate the need for segregation of GM and non-GM products.

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#2**

Why Genetically Modified Foods Should Be Labeled

Carole Bartolotto, *The Huffington Post*. 10/04/2013

Did you know that you have been enrolled in the largest research study ever conducted in the United States but you never signed a consent form or agreed to participate? That's because since 1996 you -- and basically everyone you know -- have been eating genetically modified foods.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), also known as genetically modified or engineered foods, are created by forcing a piece of DNA from a totally different species, such as bacteria or viruses, into the DNA of a plant or animal. For example, genetically engineered soybeans have DNA from bacteria and viruses spliced into their DNA to help them tolerate weed killers such as Roundup.

This genetic feat creates a whole new species of plant that would have *never* occurred in nature. Most soybeans, corn, canola, cotton, sugar beets, Hawaiian papaya, some zucchini and yellow squash, and alfalfa are genetically modified. Products such as oil, high fructose corn syrup, and sugar are created from these crops and added to processed foods. This explains why nearly 80 percent of processed and most fast foods contain GMOs.

The question is, are GMOs safe for us and the environment? Actually, the answers are not clear. There are no long-term studies demonstrating that GMOs are safe for humans and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not do its own safety testing of GMOs. Instead, the biotech companies that are trying to commercialize these crops do their own safety assessments, which the FDA only reviews. However, there are animal studies with negative findings, including organ damage, infertility, and immune system changes. It is clear we need more research in this area.

The environment is another issue. What are the implications when a genetically modified plant crossbreeds with other plants? The monarch butterflies are declining due to the destruction of milkweed. What other consequences are possible? Super bugs and super weeds are already showing up. Do we really want to irreversibly change the face of plant life with unknown consequences for the monetary benefit of a few large corporations and their investors?

The bottom line is that we have a product in our food supply with unknown health and environmental implications. At the very least, we should have these foods labeled. However, try as we might, we cannot make that happen in the U.S. Even though 9 out of 10 people want them labeled, the biotech companies and food manufacturers do not. If their products are beneficial and safe, why not label them? Why not be proud of your product? Over 60 countries, including China, label GMOs and some countries ban them. Why can't we have transparency in our food supply?

Washington [State's] Initiative 522 to label genetically engineered foods, on the November ballot, will help us get the transparency we desire*. But companies such as Monsanto, Dupont Pioneer, Bayer CropScience, Dow Agrosiences, and the Grocery Manufacturers Association (a trade group) will pay millions to create misleading and factually incorrect ads telling Washingtonites that labeling will cost money, hurt farmers, and isn't necessary because GMOs are safe. However, we know if a food has high fructose corn syrup, trans fat, or is irradiated. Why can't we know if it's genetically engineered? The biggest fear of these companies is that once GMOs are labeled, we won't want to eat them anymore. And that may happen, just like it did when we found out there was pink slime in our hamburgers!

Our country is based on a free market economy. If you are supplying a product and we don't want it, then the market dictates it will go away. This is why the biotech companies and food manufacturers will probably spend over 25 million dollars to prevent the labeling of GMOs.

I don't know about you, but I always loved a good David and Goliath story. If Washington's Initiative 522 passes and genetically modified foods are labeled, that is exactly what we will have. And, it just might change the face of American agriculture forever.

***note: Washington State's Initiative 522 to require the labeling of GMOs was defeated in November 2013. The vote was roughly 49% in favor of labeling to 51% against.**

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#3**

Labels for GMO Foods Are a Bad Idea

Aug 20, 2013 By The Editors, *Scientific American*

This past June, Connecticut and Maine became the first states to pass bills requiring labels on all foods made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In November 2012 California voters rejected the similar Proposition 37 by a narrow majority of 51.4 percent. “All we want is a simple label/For the food that’s on our table,” chanted marchers before the elections. The issue, however, is in no way simple.

We have been tinkering with our food’s DNA since the dawn of agriculture. By selectively breeding plants and animals with the most desirable traits, our predecessors transformed organisms’ genomes, turning a scraggly grass into plump-kerneled corn, for example. For the past 20 years Americans have been eating plants in which scientists have used modern tools to insert a gene here or tweak a gene there, helping the crops tolerate drought and resist herbicides. Around 70 percent of processed foods in the U.S. contain genetically modified ingredients.

Instead of providing people with useful information, mandatory GMO labels would only intensify the misconception that so-called Frankenfoods endanger people’s health. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the World Health Organization and the exceptionally vigilant European Union agree that GMOs are just as safe as other foods.

Compared with conventional breeding techniques—which swap giant chunks of DNA between one plant and another—genetic engineering is far more precise and, in most cases, is less likely to produce an unexpected result. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has tested all the GMOs on the market to determine whether they are toxic or allergenic. They are not. (The GMO-fearing can seek out “100 Percent Organic” products, indicating that a food contains no genetically modified ingredients, among other requirements.)

Many people argue for GMO labels in the name of increased consumer choice. On the contrary, such labels have limited people’s options. In 1997, a time of growing opposition to GMOs in Europe, the E.U. began to require them. By 1999, to avoid labels that might drive customers away, most major European retailers had removed genetically modified ingredients from products bearing their brand. Major food producers such as Nestlé followed suit. Today it is virtually impossible to find GMOs in European supermarkets.

Americans who oppose genetically modified foods would celebrate a similar exclusion. Everyone else would pay a price. Because conventional crops often require more water and pesticides than GMOs do, the former are usually more expensive. Consequently, we would all have to pay a premium on non-GMO foods—and for a questionable return. Private research firm Northbridge Environmental Management Consultants estimated that [California’s] Prop 37 would have raised an average California family’s yearly food bill by as much as \$400. The measure would also have required farmers, manufacturers and retailers to keep a whole new set of detailed records and to prepare for lawsuits challenging the “naturalness” of their products.

Antagonism toward GMO foods also strengthens the stigma against a technology that has delivered enormous benefits to people in developing countries and promises far more. Recently published data from a seven-year study of Indian farmers show that those growing a genetically modified crop increased their yield per acre by 24 percent and boosted profits by 50 percent. These farmers were able to buy more food—and food of greater nutritional value—for their families.

To curb vitamin A deficiency—which blinds as many as 500,000 children worldwide every year and kills half of them—researchers have engineered Golden Rice, which produces beta-

carotene, a precursor of vitamin A. Approximately three quarters of a cup of Golden Rice provides the recommended daily amount of vitamin A; several tests have concluded that the product is safe. Yet Greenpeace and other anti-GMO organizations have used misinformation and hysteria to delay the introduction of Golden Rice to the Philippines, India and China. More such products are in the works, but only with public support and funding will they make their way to people's plates. An international team of researchers has engineered a variety of cassava—a staple food for 600 million people—with 30 times the usual amount of beta-carotene and four times as much iron, as well as higher levels of protein and zinc. Another group of scientists has created corn with 169-fold the typical amount of beta-carotene, six times as much vitamin C and double the folate.

At press time, GMO-label legislation is pending in at least 20 states. Such debates are about so much more than slapping ostensibly simple labels on our food to satisfy a segment of American consumers. Ultimately, we are deciding whether we will continue to develop an immensely beneficial technology or shun it based on unfounded fears.

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