

# The anti-GM food circus rolls through Connecticut

By ACSH Staff — February 24, 2012

And speaking of junk science legislation, a Connecticut state environmental committee is [considering](#) [1] a bill that would require a label on all genetically engineered foods. Yet Gregory J. Costa, director of state affairs for the Grocery Manufacturers Association, counters fears that such biotech products are somehow harmful. Genetic modified (GM) ingredients are no different nutritionally and from a safety standpoint than other foods that do not have genetically modified ingredients, Costa maintains. Furthermore, the FDA, following a review of the available science, has determined that there is no need to label GM foods because there is no evidence that such foods are substantially different from conventionally produced foods.

Yet such sound evidence isn't stemming the tide of anti-GM rhetoric. Rep. Diana Urban (D-CT) is a labeling advocate who believes GM foods could trigger allergies in children. I think that requiring labeling is really a very positive step for making the market as efficient and effective as possible, she says.

But as Gregory Conko, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, argues in his latest [op-ed](#) [2], there's no need to label GM foods: A myriad of highly accredited scientific bodies, such as the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization, have already deemed them safe. In fact, he says, biotech produce may actually be safer than plants developed with conventional methods.

Something few people know is that, since the 1930s, conventional crops have been intentionally mutated with ionizing radiation and highly toxic, carcinogenic chemicals in order to produce the best possible species. Many anti-biotech activists may be surprised to learn that, nowadays, these mutant varieties may actually be categorized as organic. Although these mutant or cross-bred plant varieties are safe and not a cause for concern, Conko does point out that the imprecision and unpredictability of these methods is one reason that scientists say GM foods are at least as safe as, if not safer than, conventional plant varieties.

But facts aren't what matter to most anti-biotech activists, given that they are frequently uninformed about the science behind the practice. For instance, the results of a poll against GM foods called Just Label It demonstrate that, although these folks are nominally opposed to agricultural biotechnology, the large majority have little knowledge about the process in general or about how these foods are regulated.

This is another reason, Conko says, why such products should not be subject to labeling. And according to the U.S. Constitution, the government does not have the right to mandate product labeling unless the added information affects consumer health or safety. But since plants developed with biotechnology, as the FDA has determined, are not inherently more risky than those bred with conventional methods, they need not be subject to special labels. In fact, a U.S.

Second Circuit Court of Appeals followed this logic when striking down a Vermont statute that would have required labels on milk derived from cows treated with bioengineered growth hormones. [W]ere consumer interest alone sufficient, there is no end to the information that states could force manufacturers to disclose, the court concluded.

We have been modifying the genetics of food crops by less precise methods for an incredibly long time, says ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. If anything, bioengineered foods are safer and more precise now than ever before. Rejection of such foods is tragic, given that they have vastly increased crop yields and helped to feed millions of the starving populations in developing nations.

To ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava, the proposed GM food labeling bill is simply absurd. Most consumers don't understand what genetic engineering entails, or what conventional agricultural practices consist of, she observes. Yet if you explained the facts to them mainly that bioengineered products are often safer and take up fewer resources they would have no scientific reason to oppose GM foods.

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