Food company consortium proposes a federal GMO-labeling bill

By ACSH Staff — January 13, 2014

The issue of whether or not to label foods containing GMOs has been a hot topic for the past few years. Up till now, these labeling laws have been proposed by individual states. However, the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), representing food and beverage companies such as ConAgra, PepsiCo and Kraft, is now proposing [1] a national solution to the GMO labeling question.

According to Louis Finkel, head of government affairs for GMA, We believe that it’s important for Congress to engage and provide FDA with the ability to have a national standard on GMO food labeling. A 50-state patchwork of regulations is irresponsible. GMA’s proposed regulation would involve the FDA setting up voluntary labeling standards for foods that do not contain GMO products. The legislation would also prohibit individual states from implementing laws different from the federal requirements, giving the FDA a more active role in GMO-labeling legislation. The FDA would also be responsible for determining the safety of GMO products, which according to Finkel, would reassure consumers about the safety of GMO foods.

Other provisions included in the draft bill are that GMO-free labels could be used on dairy products produced from cows that are fed GMO-containing feed and that the FDA must define the term natural which has not been clearly defined in the past.

However, skeptics say that the proposed bill is not clear about what would be involved in the FDA safety review. They also take issue with the fact that the bill does not mention environmental or other potential effects of GMO foods, or animals such as AquAdvantage salmon.

ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan had this perspective: It’s obvious that having a patchwork of states with different regulations regarding labelling of products is unacceptable. Of course, GMO-containing (biotech) foods are not a health threat to anyone, but that is merely a scientific position, based on technology and 17+ years experience of millions of consumers eating these products
without any trace or suggestion of harm. Those opposed to biotechnology are either reacting out of superstition and baseless fears, or are beholden to the organic food industry, which is now a behemoth, but they have succeeded in fomenting consumer and corporate concerns. All parties should be happy with this new idea, consolidating the labelling issue. I would prefer if those who choose to market non-GMO products just went ahead and labelled their own items and left the rest of us alone.

ACSH has two key publications on agricultural biotechnology and food coming out within the next two weeks: watch for them!