

New federal GMO labeling bill introduced

By ACSH Staff — April 11, 2014



Congressman Mike Pompeo (R-KS) recently introduced a [bill](#) ^[1] that

would preempt any efforts by state legislatures to require manufacturers to label the presence of genetically-engineered ingredients in their products. His bill, the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act (SAFLA), would give this responsibility to the FDA instead. That is, it would require that new foods produced with genetically modified organisms be submitted to the FDA for review (under current law such a review is voluntary). If the FDA determines there is a difference between the genetically modified food and non-modified food and that disclosing that is necessary to protect health and safety, the FDA can require a label.

Although no state laws requiring labeling have yet been implemented, many states are considering legislation to require such labeling and varying requirements from state to state would be a headache for the food industry, to say the least. So the industry is behind such simplifying federal legislation. But is a federal mandate the way to go? Experts don't all agree.

The pros for this legislation are obvious: it would greatly simplify the labeling requirements nationwide, thus ensuring that no state could set up its own regulatory system. Thus, it might satisfy anti-biotech agitators. But, as Dr. Martina Newell-McGloughlin of the University of California, Davis (and a co-author of our [publications](#) ^[2] on biotechnology and agriculture), asserts, No matter what you do you are never going to satisfy those whose, not so covert, agenda is to get a complete ban on biotech products. The state initiatives are just as much about raising fear and doubt as they are about actually prevailing in getting labeling passed.

Similarly, Dr. Bruce Chassy, Professor Emeritus of Food Science and Human Nutrition at the University of Illinois, another co-author, commented that he is opposed to process-based legislation for any reason (as opposed to product-based regulation which is what the FDA currently does). He continued This is a problem that can't be legislated away.

Speaking on the other side of the issue, Dr. Allan Felsot, professor of entomology and environmental toxicology at Washington State University (and author of ACSH's recent

publication, Pesticides and Health), feels that the proposed legislation will prevent a patchwork of separate labeling laws. Further, it would counteract the claim that the FDA doesn't review the safety of biotech crops he continued.

While admitting the validity of concerns raised by both sides of the issue, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava was concerned about setting a precedent for at least appearing to deviate from the FDA's science-based mandate: The short-term attraction of barring state-level mandates requiring labels on perfectly safe GMO-containing products is seductive, but may be encouraging anti-technology activists to even more intense pressure over the long-term. The possibility of a patchwork of different labelling mandates state-by-state, after drawn-out, expensive campaigns to fight agenda-driven mandate campaigns, is so disconcerting that it's understandable why many in the pro-science camp would be content with passage of the Pompeo bill. We here at ACSH are concerned about the unintended consequences down the road, however.

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[2] <http://www.scribd.com/doc/213710701/Food-and-You-A-Guide-To-Modern-Agricultural-Biotechnology>