

Federal GMO labeling bill back in Congress

By ACSH Staff — March 27, 2015



The Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, first proposed by

Representative Mike Pompeo (R-Kan) and Representative G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.) is [once again being](#) [1] considered in Congress. As [we discussed last year](#) [2], this bill would preempt any efforts by state legislatures to require manufacturers to label the presence of genetically-engineered ingredients in their products and would instead transfer that responsibility to the FDA. 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. (The FDA has, in the past, expressed their conclusion that there is no such difference and has declined to approve or recommend labelling).

Most recently, the discussion focused on an aspect of the bill that would create a voluntary USDA Non-GMO labeling certification process, similar to the Organic Seal, in which manufacturers can choose to label their products using this label. This would remove much of the confusion generated from the proposed state-specific GMO labeling laws and would give consumers who do not want to purchase foods containing GMOs that option (although the organic label already does that). Furthermore, individual state laws would have negatively impacted manufacturers who would have passed those costs on to consumers. The federal bill eliminates this concern.

However, it is important to consider that the science has demonstrated over and over again that GM foods are essentially the same as their conventional counterparts, and the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association and many other leading scientific bodies in the world have declared GMOs safe as a result of almost 2000 studies.

The debate continues with the introduction of the bill. As Dr. Martina Newell-McGloughlin of the University of California, Davis (and a co-author of our [publications](#) [3] on biotechnology and agriculture), [asserted when we discussed](#) [2] this bill last year, 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.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, Clearly the science does not support GMO labeling laws, [and although a majority of consumers](#) [4] think it's important to know if foods are made with genetically

engineered (GMO) ingredients, most are unaware about what's already available in the marketplace, or the lack of relevance of this information. It's important that this bill be accompanied by educational efforts to provide consumers with scientifically sound information on GMOs and agriculture.

She goes on, What this bill does do, however, is ensure that GMOs will be kept in the marketplace, as state labeling laws would not only have made these foods unattractive to consumers but would also have made them more expensive. This bill is clearly based on consumer preference.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom would like to point out that, While this bill will simplify matters by preventing a mish mash of different laws from different states, I think it sends the exact wrong message that there is any difference in ingredients obtained from plants that have either been genetically modified (e.g., sugar from GM sugar beet) or not (sugar from sugar cane). There is none. Furthermore, even the presence of such a law, regardless of what is in it, creates an artificial distinction between new hybrid products that have been created by modern (GM) or traditional (non-GM) methods. This is nonsense, since everything we eat is genetically modified by one method or another. It may make marketing food more convenient, but reinforces the bad science that is already out there.

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[1] <http://www.progressivegrocer.com/industry-news-trends/regulatory-affairs/national-gmo-food-labeling-bill-introduced>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2014/04/new-federal-gmo-labeling-bill-introduced/>

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

[4] <http://acsh.org/2015/02/new-gmo-labeling-bill-introduced-amidst-approval-gm-apple/>