

Food Industry Pushes for Voluntary GMO Labeling

MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press



This June 16, 2011 file photo shows boxes of Cheerios in a store in Akron, N.Y. Large food companies are trying to head off state-by-state efforts to enact mandatory labeling of genetically modified ingredients by proposing new voluntary labels nationwide. The food industry and farm groups are pushing Congress to pass legislation that would require the Food and Drug Administration to create guidelines for the new labels, which food manufacturers could use. (AP Photo/David Duprey, File)

WASHINGTON (AP) — Large food companies are trying to head off state efforts to enact mandatory labeling of genetically modified ingredients by proposing new voluntary labels nationwide.

The food industry and farm groups are pushing Congress to pass legislation that would require the Food and Drug Administration to create guidelines for the new labels, which food manufacturers could use.

A federal standard for voluntary labels would get food manufacturers off the hook if any states pass laws requiring mandatory labeling. Recent ballot initiatives in California and Washington failed, but several state legislatures are considering labeling requirements and opponents of engineered ingredients are aggressively pushing new laws in several states.

There's very little science that says genetically engineered foods are unsafe. But opponents say there's too much unknown about the seeds that are altered in labs to have certain traits, and that consumers have a right to know if they are eating them. The seeds are engineered for a variety of reasons, many of them to resist herbicides or insects.

Pamela Bailey, president and CEO of the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the food industry's main trade group, said the decision on labels should rest with the Food and Drug Administration, which is set up to assess the safety of foods.

"It does not serve national food safety policy to leave these issues to political

Food Industry Pushes for Voluntary GMO Labeling

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

campaigns," she said.

The grocery manufacturers announced a partnership with 28 farm and food industry groups Thursday to push for the legislation. The groups include the National Corn Growers Association, the National Restaurant Association and the National Beverage Association, all industries that have seen pushback from consumers over modified ingredients.

The groups say mandatory labels would cause confusion, misleading consumers into thinking that the ingredients are unsafe. The labels could also be inconsistent from state to state, the groups said.

The industries are lobbying members of Congress to introduce and pass a bill that would require FDA to do a safety review of new genetically engineered ingredients before they are sold in food. So far, FDA has not found safety issues with modified ingredients.

The companies are facing pressure from retailers as the conversation about modified ingredients has grown louder. Whole Foods announced last year that it plans to label GMO products in all its U.S. and Canadian stores within five years.

And some companies have decided to just remove the ingredients altogether, so no labels will be necessary. General Mills recently announced it would no longer use GMOs in its original Cheerios recipe.

It is unclear whether there is support for voluntary labels in Congress. Many lawmakers from farm states have defended the technology.

In May, the Senate overwhelmingly rejected an amendment by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. that would have allowed states to require labeling of genetically modified foods.

Sanders' amendment to a wide-ranging farm bill was an attempt to clarify that states can require the labels, as several legislatures have moved toward putting such laws into place. Senators from farm states that use a lot of genetically modified crops strongly opposed the amendment, saying the issue should be left up to the federal government and that labels could raise costs for consumers.

The final farm bill, which Congress passed and sent to President Barack Obama this week, does not weigh in on genetically modified ingredients.

Opponents of the modified ingredients say the sentiment may change in Congress as more states wade into the labeling debate. Scott Faber of the Environmental Working Group, a Washington advocacy group that supports labeling, says he expects around 30 state legislatures to consider the issue this year.

Maine and Connecticut have already enacted labeling laws for engineered foods, but they won't go into effect until other states in the region follow suit. And Oregon may be the next state to consider a ballot measure on the issue.

Food Industry Pushes for Voluntary GMO Labeling

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Faber says momentum is building across the country for labeling, "not because consumers are concerned about the technology, but because consumers are demanding to know more and more about their food."

Source URL (retrieved on 03/06/2015 - 3:58pm):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/02/food-industry-pushes-voluntary-gmo-labeling>