Vt. GMO Bill Gains Public Support

DAVE GRAM, Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — More than 200 Vermonters gathered at the Statehouse on Thursday to tell two Vermont Senate committees they want food containing genetically modified products to be labeled as such [1].

Americans were told decades ago that the now-banned pesticide DDT was safe, said Nova Kim, a collector and seller of wild mushrooms from Fairlee. "I spent the better part of my life dealing with health issues as a result," she said.

She and others who testified said they, in Kim's words, "simply want to be able to choose," whether to eat genetically modified food. Many voiced strong suspicion about pesticides used on foods, and argued that genetically modified organisms are often designed to allow freer use of the chemicals.

One of the chemicals, the widely used herbicide Roundup, kills milkweed, a crucial food source for monarch butterflies, said Elizabeth Howard of Norwich.

The crowd's sentiment was clear from the beginning. Signup sheets for speakers just before the hearing started showed more than 80 had put their names down as wanting to speak in favor of labeling. One person was opposed to the bill. It could not be determined if that was the same man who later testified that he opposed the bill because it was too weak.

The Vermont House passed a labeling bill last year [2]. A draft pending in the Senate contains "options" for how the bill would become effective in the state. One would make a labeling law effective 18 months after two other states had passed similar legislation; another would require that four other states pass a labeling law.

Another provision would address fears that a state law would bring a court challenge from the biotech industry. It would set up a special defense fund to which labeling supporters could donate, with Vermont's law taking effect when the fund accumulated $5 million.

Many speakers expressed little sympathy for the threat of lawsuits or the strategy of waiting for other states.

"I beg you to pass the labeling law without a trigger, regardless of what other states are going to do," said Silvia Smith of South Strafford.

"Giving New Hampshire the power to decide if a Vermont law goes into effect is unacceptable," said Stuart Blood of Thetford Center.

The biotech industry has argued there is no chemical difference between foods containing genetically modified ingredients and those that don't. On Thursday, a

group of 28 food industry groups said they would support voluntary use by food companies of labels approved by the Food and Drug Administration indicating the food is genetically modified. Such a national system would pre-empt state laws.

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 FDA, which is set up to assess the safety of foods.

"It does not serve national food safety policy to leave these issues to political campaigns," she said.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/16/2014 - 8:23am*):
http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/02/vt-gmo-bill-gains-public-support

Links:
[1] http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/05/senate-rejects-gmo-labeling-amendment-farm-bill
[2] http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/05/vt-house-approves-gmo-labeling-bill