

Hawaii House Revives, Quickly Kills GMO Bill

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HONOLULU (AP) — An effort to require labels on [genetically modified foods in Hawaii](#) [1] was brought back to life in the state legislature, but it died in committee on Thursday almost as quickly as it was revived.

Representative Jessica Wooley, chairwoman of the House Agriculture Committee, gutted an agriculture bill to replace it with the GMO-labeling requirements.

Wooley, D-Kaneohe, was transparent about the fact that she had drafted a "gut-and-replace" bill, a legislative maneuver disdained by government watchdog groups like Common Cause. "That is one prerogative of the chair if we believe there is an issue that needs to be heard," she said.

Supporters told the committee that Hawaii residents have the right to know what's going into their foods.

"As a farmer and a consumer, I want to know if my food has been modified," said Robert Petricci, a representative of Puna Pono Alliance, a group that advocates for sustainable, healthy policies and has more than 1,800 members. "At present it's almost impossible to know what's GMO free."

Carrie Martell, a mother who lives on the North Shore of Oahu, said her son suffered from rashes and temper tantrums but didn't test positive for any allergies. When she stripped genetically modified foods from his diet, his episodes stopped, she said.

But some of her Wooley's fellow committee members weren't pleased that the bill was amended so quickly, and they challenged the way the bill was written, questioning how the state would enforce labeling laws.

Rep. Isaac Choy, D-Manoa, asked exactly how the state would figure out if a food had been mislabeled.

"From an enforcement standpoint, unless we have the entire genome of the plant, we won't be able to test," said Gary Gill, deputy director at the Hawaii Department of Health.

"We're going to pass a law that has no enforcement at all?" Choy asked.

"If we want to try to move this forward, we cannot burden the state agencies with the enforcement aspect," Wooley replied.

Members of the committee continued to challenge state representatives, Kauai County Councilman Gary Hooser and each other to hash out the mechanics of the

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bill, until Wooley called a recess to reprimand committee members, saying they were verbally attacking her.

Eventually, Wooley deferred the bill indefinitely, so it's out of consideration for this legislative session unless an unusual effort is made to bring it back.

"I felt like they were sleeping through our testimony and just throwing up red herrings," Martell said after the decision. "I feel sad."

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