

# Massachusetts Pushes for Genetic Food Label

BOB SALSBERG, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Supporters of an effort to require labels on food containing genetically modified ingredients said Wednesday they had enough backing in the Massachusetts Legislature to pass a bill, while acknowledging there was no guarantee the measure will come up for a vote.

Groups that advocate for labeling released a bipartisan list of more than 140 lawmakers who support the bill, comprising majorities in both the House and Senate. But key legislators who hold the power to advance the measure, including Senate President Therese Murray and House Speaker Robert DeLeo, have yet to commit.

"Oddly enough, having a majority of each branch as co-sponsors isn't absolutely a lockbox guarantee that it's going to pass in either branch," said Sen. Michael Barrett, a Lexington Democrat who is a lead sponsor in the Senate.

The current legislative session ends July 31.

The bill seeks to require labels on food products and agricultural seed stock that contain genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. Passage, however, would still not guarantee labeling in Massachusetts. Under a so-called trigger mechanism in the bill, the law could only take effect if at least four other Northeast states — encompassing at least 20 million residents in the region — also approve GMO labeling laws.

So far, Maine and Connecticut have passed measures that are similarly contingent on passage by other states.

Vermont, meanwhile, is on a path to become the first state to actually require labeling when its law takes effect in 2016.

Supporters say labeling is a common-sense approach that would allow consumers to make informed choices about what they eat.

"This should not be a controversial bill," said Rep. Ellen Story, D-Amherst. "We are asking for something that is so obvious, so reasonable. Let us know what is in the food we buy."

The food industry points to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's voluntary labeling policy, but opposes making it mandatory.

Industry officials contend that genetically modified ingredients are safe and tout the benefits of advances in biotechnology, including the ability to produce more food on less land and reduce the amount of crop lost to disease.

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"Despite an ongoing campaign by supporters of mandatory GMO labeling to scare and mislead consumers about the safety and benefits of GM technology, the vast majority of Americans still have no concerns about the role of GMOs in our food," said Claire Parker, spokeswoman for the industry-backed Coalition for Safe and Affordable Food, in a recent statement.

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