

'Right-to-Farm' Amendment Shields Against Anti-GMO, Animal Rights Groups

DAVID A. LIEB, Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Gov. Jay Nixon said Tuesday that he is leaning toward opposing an August ballot measure that would insert a right to farm in the Missouri Constitution, ending his silence on the subject.

The farming amendment was referred to the ballot by Missouri's Republican-led Legislature, with the support of some Democrats, and has been officially endorsed by the Missouri Republican State Committee.

The proposed amendment states that the right "to engage in farming and ranching practices shall be forever guaranteed in this state."

Several Democratic officials also are supporting it, including Attorney General Chris Koster, who is to hold an event Wednesday with the group campaigning for the measure.

But Nixon, a Democrat, has remained publicly silent about the measure since he used his constitutional powers to shift the proposed Constitutional Amendment 1 from the November general election to the Aug. 5 primaries. Asked Tuesday about the measure by The Associated Press, Nixon said he believes the state constitution already is pretty long.

"I always have a deferral position of unless I really, really am for it, then I'm not for amending the constitution," Nixon said.

Asked if that means he opposes the right-to-farm amendment, Nixon responded: "I certainly lean that way."

Supporters hope amending the constitution could provide a legal shield against efforts by animal welfare groups to restrict particular farming methods or by organic food advocates to prohibit genetically modified crops.

Opponents contend the proposed constitutional amendment could be cited by corporate farms to try to avoid regulations against pollution and unsanitary conditions.

Nixon said he doesn't think the amendment will have that big of an effect.

"I don't see the underlying problem at the level that proponents say, nor do I see the negatives of it at the same tone that the opponents say," Nixon said.

A separate August ballot proposal asks voters whether to amend the constitution to

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

enhance the existing right to keep and bear arms. It would expand that to cover ammunition and firearms accessories, state that gun rights are "unalienable" and require strict legal scrutiny for any gun-rights restrictions.

Nixon said the U.S. Constitution already contains strong protections for the right to keep and bear arms.

"If they want to add that to the state constitution, I'm fine with that," Nixon said.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/27/2015 - 9:42am):

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