

Why Label Genetically Engineered Foods?

With so many health, environmental and ethical considerations surrounding genetically engineered foods, it seems only prudent to encourage labeling as a means of helping consumers to make informed choices. The Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods strongly supports your right to know whether the foods you are eating have been genetically mutated.

Genetically engineered food labeling already takes place in Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. If these countries offer their citizens labeling protection, shouldn't the United States be doing at least as much?

Labeling will foster consumer awareness of genetically engineered foods.

The businesses behind bioengineering have rapidly infiltrated the supermarkets with genetically engineered products. Today, an estimated two-thirds of products on supermarket shelves contain genetically engineered ingredients. But so far, a majority of Americans aren't even aware that most of the foods they are consuming are genetically engineered.

Biotech companies have flourished under this secrecy. Only one-third of Americans are aware that their foods contain genetically engineered ingredients. The giant agribusinesses have taken over our food supply without us knowing about it.

Labeling will substantially increase public awareness of genetic engineering and will promote a healthy public debate over the benefits and problems of genetically engineered foods.

Genetically engineered foods are poorly tested, and pose environmental and health risks.

Scientists, doctors and ecologists know little about the long-term impact of

genetically engineered foods. No human health testing has been done. Early on, the Food and Drug Administration decided that genetically engineered foods are "substantially equivalent" to non-genetically engineered foods and need no additional safety testing or labeling. Currently, biotech companies do not even need to notify the FDA that they are bringing a new product to market. The very corporations that have a financial interest in selling the products get to decide whether they are safe or not.

Because of these unknowns, a large majority of Americans polled want genetically engineered foods to be labeled.

Labeling will bring issues out into the open, and put pressure on agribusinesses to make a more compelling case for genetic engineering.

Agribusinesses have brought genetically engineered foods to the market very quietly, and fear that labeling will harm sales; polls show that a majority of Americans would prefer not to eat genetically engineered foods. Labeling would put the onus on agribusinesses to demonstrate that their products are safe--something they have yet to accomplish.

As the British journal *The Economist* puts it, "if Monsanto cannot persuade us it certainly has no right to foist its products on us."

Labeling will protect people who have allergies.

Millions of Americans have allergies to certain foods. Genetic engineering may increase the risk that they will accidentally consume foods that contain allergens. If genes of a particular kind of nut are inserted in a vegetable, for example, a consumer who is allergic to that nut may be at risk.

Without labeling, consumers will have no way of protecting themselves from hidden allergens.

Labeling will give people the option of whether or not to support the genetic engineering industry.

Due to all of the health, environmental and ethical questions revolving around genetically engineered foods, many people would prefer not to support the genetic engineering industry. So far, the only options they have are to buy all organic foods or grow their own food.

The government already supports labeling of certain foods for a wide range of reasons.

There is a long history of labeling foods in the United States. The government requires wines to be labeled if they contain sulfites. Food labels must contain fat and caloric content, even though huge numbers of Americans are not overweight. Food labels must reveal the source of hydrolyzed proteins to accommodate vegetarians.

To put it into perspective, the government requires labeling when orange juices are "made from concentrate." Shouldn't it also require labeling when the genetic structure of the food has been changed?

The public strongly supports labeling of genetically engineered foods.

Public opinion polls consistently show that 80 to 95 percent of Americans want genetically engineered foods to be labeled. For example, an ABC News poll conducted in June 2001 found that 93 percent of Americans want labeling.

Isn't it about time to give the people what they want?

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