

New Spending Bill Allocates Funding to Promote GMOS

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Washington, D.C. – An article in the Washington Post reports that as part of the spending bill passed by Congress to avoid government shutdown and fund the government until the end of September, \$3 million will be allocated to a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) program to reach out and educate consumers about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in an effort to counter what they consider misinformation about the dangers of GMOs. In an April 18 letter 50 agriculture- and food-industry companies urged the House Committee on Appropriations to fund such a measure, but critics consider this program a state-sponsored propaganda campaign for the biotech industry.

It is additionally controversial considering that members of Congress receive campaign contributions from biotech companies. According to a report, which cites the Center for Responsive Politics, agribusiness interests donated \$26.3 million to political campaigns. A more specific example is Rep. Robert B. Alderholt (R-Ala.), the chair of the House agriculture appropriations subcommittee and a defender of the GMO education funding, who received \$10,000 from Monsanto in 2016.

Proponents of the program argue that the measure is important in order to tighten the disparity between scientific consensus and public opinion. Two different studies by the Pew Research Center found that 39% of consumers believe that GMOs are worse for human health while nearly 90% of American Association for the Advancement of Science members agree that GMOs are perfectly safe. Public opinion of GMOs is certainly reflected in the continued growth of the natural products industry as consumers more actively seek our natural, organic, and non-GMO foods and other products.

Indeed, our industry actively advocates against the use of GMOs in dietary supplements, foods, and even cosmetics for both human health and environmental reasons. Even if GMOs themselves were proven safe, the increased use of herbicides that has been associated with GMOs would pose enough of a threat to farm workers, consumers, and the environment. Unfortunately, they are a huge industry, GMOs making up 80% of the United States' corn and soy products, meaning that there is little incentive to curb GMO use and a larger incentive to promote its use. This education campaign appears to make clear, if it wasn't already, our government's position on the use of GMOs.

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