

A Small Victory for NHF on GMO Labeling

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The acronym GMO usually refers to Genetically Modified Organisms. In this case, there is a direct connection with Monsanto, Dupont, and other large biotech companies that produce genetically engineered seeds, which grow into GMO crops, and find their way into an estimated 70 percent of processed foods sold in American grocery stores. In this case it also refers to Generated Monsanto Obstruction.

Both last year and this year, the National Health Federation has closely followed the Congressional affairs of Monsanto and its active engagement in the passing of the federal USDA farm bill reauthorization. The reauthorization happens, or is supposed to happen, every five years. Monsanto has been trying to manipulate the Congress into passing a Farm Bill with provisions that will wipe out citizens' rights to State laws intended to protect their health and safety when it applies to the labeling of GMO products. It is important to note that 24 States have considered legislation that would require labeling of foods containing genetically modified organisms. Monsanto and other big agribusinesses also want Congress to permanently extend what is called the "Monsanto Protection Act" (MPA).

The MPA is a short-term new law that permits Monsanto, DuPont, and other companies to sell genetically modified seeds that have not been properly examined for their effect on other farmers, the environment, and human health. It grants judicial immunity to big farming companies who sell seeds and to the farmers who plant crops that could later be determined to be unsafe for human or animal consumption. The U.S. grows the most GMO crops in the World. Rhetorically speaking, why should U.S. citizens be concerned with China importing contaminated and unsafe food into our country for consumption when Monsanto and others are doing it from inside our own borders, with judicial immunity for the time being?

The Farm Bill involves trillions of U.S. taxpayer dollars that would fund the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its farmer support programs and Federal food assistance programs. These programs are now being funded under a Continuing Resolution (CR) spending bill. The current Continuing Resolution expires at the end of this September. When Congress passed the

Resolution last January, it was Senator Roy Blunt, from Missouri, the home State of Monsanto, who got the "Monsanto Protection Act" included. So, unless things change, it will expire at the end of this September. Monsanto and the large biotech companies were successful in getting Representative Steve King, from Iowa, to get a permanent extension of the MPA into the House Agriculture Committee bill that was voted out of committee for a full House vote. A second King amendment, also backed by Monsanto and other large companies, was included in the House Farm Bill to impose the Federal Preemption Doctrine as the basis to prevent individual States (such as California tried with its Prop 37) from enacting their own GMO labeling laws.

On June 6th, the Senate voted to end debate on its farm bill, S.954, the "Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013"; and on June 10th, voted 66 For and 27 Against final passage. During debate prior to this action, an amendment sponsored by Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and four other Senators to clarify that States can voluntarily enact their own GMO labeling laws was defeated. An amendment of Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) to overturn the so-called MPA law was defeated. The final Senate bill included *no* language on blocking States from enacting GMO food labeling, and no extension language for the Monsanto Protection Act. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) is on record as being opposed to extending the MPA provision in a Federal spending bill through the appropriations process (which is the Continuing Resolution back door that was used by Senator Blunt to get the MPA on the books in the first place, so to speak). And, she stated on the Senate floor that it would be inappropriate for its inclusion in a final farm bill approved by Congress.

It was a different situation with the House bill, H.R.1947, the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management (FARRM) Act of 2013. On June 20th, the full House voted H.R.1947 down by 39 votes. The vote was 195 For and 234 Against. Sixty-two Republicans voted against the bill, while two dozen Democrats supported it. Most Democrats opposed the bill, unhappy with a \$20.5 billion, 10-year cut to the Federal food-stamp program and backed by a White House veto threat, while Republicans split into competing factions, with a sizable group egged on by a host of conservative interest groups opposed to the bill over concerns it did not cut enough spending, i.e., taxpayer-funded price supports for numerous food crops and export programs.

Over the course of several days, 100 amendments were considered to the House bill. Not surprisingly, none challenged the two King amendments added in the Agriculture Committee. One might think that the use of the Federal Preemption Doctrine to block the States' inherent rights, reserved to them under the U.S. Constitution, to enact their own GMO labeling laws, and block our right to know what is in the food we consume would be a major issue. Likewise, granting large agribusiness companies special legal privileges, obviously based upon their campaign contributions to State and Congressional legislators, should have been a hot topic for public consumption.

These big corporate farming players continue to contribute to Congressional campaigns and attend fundraisers for targeted politicians. They are spending millions of lobbying dollars to

protect their anti-GMO corporate policy and legislation at both State and Federal levels of governments to maintain special privileges that thwart individual choice and knowledge. Health-freedom advocates across the Country are well aware of the millions of Monsanto dollars being spent to obstruct the common sense of millions of Americans, especially in California. State legislatures in Vermont and Connecticut moved ahead this month with votes to make food companies declare genetically modified ingredients on their packages.

The unknown human health risks associated with the use of GM technology and the release of genetically modified organisms in crops and their subsequent processing into the human food chain cannot be dismissed. Ninety percent of U.S. and Canadian consumers want their food labeled as GMO if it contains biotech food. It is common sense and the common values of the people versus corporate interests and their political money influencing decision-makers in the U.S. Congress.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not require genetically modified foods to carry a label but it does require that labels tell consumers how much caffeine is contained in a given food or beverage. This is yet another public health-and-safety Federal policy snafu to say the least. Of course, this is incomprehensible by any common sense standards; but money and politics are also at work. NHF members, and thousands of like-minded individuals, believe that people should have the ability to make informed choices on their own consumption of food products. Without labeling there is no knowledge. States should have the right to enact public laws supported by their own citizens. Monsanto and other companies are using the Federal Preemption Doctrine to block the States' inherent rights, reserved to them under the U.S. Constitution, to enact their own GMO labeling laws, and to block our right to know what is in the food we consume. This stacks up right next to the numerous examples of governmental abuse of power and arrogance.

The Farm bill fight is not over. The House farm program reauthorization bill can be brought back up for a vote. The legislative course of action in voting down the House bill was a surprising day for the large agribusiness companies actively engaged in the production and sale of genetically modified organisms. It was a small victory for pro-GMO labeling activists, and for not allowing these players to avoid accountability while putting financial greed ahead of public health and safety.

The large agribusinesses are not going away on these two important issues, and neither will the NHF. The National Health Federation has been fighting on U.S. and Canadian soil against GMOs for years and internationally at Codex Alimentarius meetings for full disclosure to consumers on labels of GMO products. NHF members have the right to be fully informed about the foods and drinks they choose to consume. To do otherwise is simply unacceptable.