



POLICY & ACTION FROM CONSUMER REPORTS

December 9, 2014

The Honorable Joe Pitts, Chairman
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pitts and Ranking Member Pallone:

Consumers Union, the public policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, urges you to oppose H.R. 4432, a bill that would prohibit states from establishing or carrying out mandatory labeling of genetically engineered (GE) food, allow products containing GE ingredients to be labeled “natural,” and require the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to continue its current policy, in which any labeling of GE food must be the voluntary choice of the food producer. It is our understanding that this legislation will be discussed at a Subcommittee on Health hearing scheduled for tomorrow, December 10, 2014, titled “Examining FDA’s Role in the Regulation of Genetically Modified Food Ingredients.”

Consumers Union supports mandatory labeling of GE food, and opposes H.R. 4432, for several reasons. First, consumers want labeling. Polls, including one conducted in 2014 by Consumer Reports, have consistently found that more than 90 percent of consumers say they want GE food to be labeled accordingly.

Second, there are numerous precedents for labeling. FDA already requires labeling of food if it is homogenized, frozen, or made from concentrate. Some 64 countries, including most of our major trading partners, require labeling of GE food.

Third, states including Vermont, Maine, and Connecticut have begun to act on the views of their citizens and have passed legislation requiring labeling of GE food. Other states, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Illinois, have considered bills. A ballot initiative in Oregon is currently too close to call. Whether enacted by state legislatures or approved by voters, the rights of states to act democratically to carry out the wishes of their citizens on food labeling should not be impeded by Congress.

Fourth, unlike most other developed countries, the U.S. has no mandatory safety approval process, and labeling could help identify unanticipated health effects. Currently, companies may go to FDA for voluntary consultations on safety, but FDA approval is not required for food with GE ingredients, nor would it be under H.R. 4432. We are especially concerned that – through genetic engineering – allergens may be introduced or newly expressed in a plant food. Only through across-the-board mandatory labeling could a consumer know if a genetically engineered version of a food were triggering a new allergic reaction.

Fifth, mandatory labeling would not be expensive. In fact, it would add only a fraction of a cent a day to a grocery bill. An analysis commissioned by Consumers Union and conducted by the independent economic research firm ECONorthwest found from a review of published research that the median cost to consumers of requiring labeling of GE food is \$2.30 per person annually.

Finally, recent polling by Consumer Reports also found that more than 60 percent of consumers think a “natural” label on a product means it does not contain GE ingredients. However, Consumer Reports testing earlier this year identified five food products labeled “natural” that actually did contain such ingredients. H.R. 4432, by allowing foods labeled as natural to contain GE ingredients, would authorize a deceptive practice.

We therefore urge you to reject the proposals contained in H.R. 4432. Instead, the Subcommittee should advance legislation to require mandatory labeling of genetically engineered food, such as H.R. 1699, authored in the House by Rep. DeFazio.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Urvashi Rangan
Director, Food Safety and Sustainability
Consumer Reports



Jean Halloran
Director, Food Policy Initiatives
Consumers Union

Enclosures:

- (1) Consumer Reports Online, *Where GMOs hide in your food* (online at www.consumerreports.org/cro/2014/10/where-gmos-hide-in-your-food/index.htm) (Oct. 2014).
- (2) Consumer Reports Online, *Will GMO labeling boost your grocery bill?* (online at www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2014/10/will-gmo-labeling-boost-your-grocery-bill/index.htm) (Oct. 16, 2014).

cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Health