



THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

February 23, 2016

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer and Senator Gillibrand:

As cosponsors of New York State Assembly bill A.617-B, which would require mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMO) in New York State, we urge you to strongly oppose any federal legislation that would undermine our efforts to require GMO labeling.

In July 2015, the House passed H.R. 1599, which would permanently prevent states and the federal government from requiring mandatory GMO labeling on food products. This week, U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Pat Roberts (R. Kansas) will introduce a bill that calls for voluntary labeling rules and prohibits states from establishing their own GMO labeling laws. Certain Senators and lobbyists for some food and biotechnology interests are promoting proposals that prevent states from adopting GMO labeling laws and nullify Vermont's existing law, which was passed in 2014 and goes into effect in July 2016.

Bill A.617-B, New York's GMO labeling bill, enjoys broad and bipartisan support. The bill currently has 73 cosponsors in the New York State Assembly and 27 cosponsors in the New York State Senate, and has passed through several committees in both chambers. In addition, the bill is backed by a large coalition of consumer, environmental, farming, business, and community organizations. Recently, the signatures of 43,500 New Yorkers were delivered to the Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader in support of bill A.617-B, and its companion Senate bill, S.485-B.

Nationally, more than 90% of Americans support GMO labeling because they demand transparency in their food purchasing. Given such strong support and years of federal inaction, states such as New York have begun to exercise their constitutional authority to require mandatory GMO labeling.¹ H.R. 1599 and similar proposals are designed to undermine our state-level efforts to provide consumers with the transparency they demand and deserve.

Legislation to undermine state GMO labeling efforts should be rejected by the Senate, because:

¹ In 2014, Vermont became the first state to require mandatory GMO labeling. Connecticut and Maine have also passed GMO labeling laws that will go into effect once neighboring states pass similar laws.

Americans overwhelmingly want the right to know if there are GMO ingredients in their food.

National polls by Consumer Reports and the New York Times show that over 90% of consumers support labeling of GMO foods. Support is consistent across all regions of the country. Public support for labeling GMOs is also bipartisan. A poll by the Mellman Group found 93% of Democrats and 86% of Republicans and Independents in favor of labeling.

The U.S. lags behind 64 other countries -- including the European Union, Australia, Japan, China, Russia and India -- that already require GMO labeling.

The very same companies that are lobbying you to prevent GMO labeling in every single state in the U.S. are already exporting products to foreign markets where GMO food labels are the law of the land. Moreover, industry itself is divided. Campbell Soup Company recently announced that it will voluntarily label all its products nationwide, and it expects the cost to be negligible. Many other responsible companies are willing to label their products, so that consumers can choose the foods they want for themselves.

GMO crops have vastly increased application of a risky herbicide. Expanding the use of GMO crops has increased annual applications of the herbicide glyphosate from 16 million pounds to more than 280 million pounds. In January 2015, the chemical (commercial name: Roundup) was named as a probable human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Labeling has a negligible impact on food costs. According to a report commissioned by Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, the median cost to consumers of requiring labeling of GMOs is \$2.30 per person annually, or less than a penny per day. In Europe, where labeling has been in effect since 2002, there has been no measurable impact on food prices. In January, Campbell Soup Company announced that it supports mandatory GMO food labeling, and that it will label all its products nationally to comply with the Vermont GMO labeling law, without raising prices.

For all these reasons, we urge you to strongly oppose any proposals to undermine state GMO labeling efforts. Such legislation would directly affect New Yorkers, our constituents, who overwhelmingly support GMO food labeling, and would block the legislation we have carefully developed to respond to their needs and preferences. It would inappropriately interfere with a state's ability to address the concerns of its citizens. The only national GMO labeling solution that would meet consumer needs is one that includes strong, mandatory, easy-to-understand GMO labeling requirements like those set to take effect in Vermont in July 2016. Other federal bills to preempt state GMO labeling laws would continue to keep New Yorkers in the dark, and we urge you to work diligently to defeat them.

Sincerely,



Linda B. Rosenthal
Member of Assembly – 67th AD
Chair, Committee on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse



Jeffrey Dinowitz
Member of Assembly – 81st AD
Chair, Consumer Affairs and Protection

John Ceretto
Member of Assembly – 145th AD

Steve Englebright
Member of Assembly – 4th AD

Deborah J. Glick
Member of Assembly – 66th AD

Richard N. Gottfried
Member of Assembly – 75th AD

Barbara Lifton
Member of Assembly – 125th AD

Walter T. Mosley
Member of Assembly – 57th AD

Amy Paulin
Member of Assembly – 88th AD

Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Member of Assembly – 11th AD

Steve Otis
Member of Assembly – 91st AD

Nily Rozic
Member of Assembly – 25th AD

Rebecca Seawright
Member of Assembly – 76th AD

Jo Anne Simon
Member of Assembly – 52nd AD

Aravella Simotas
Member of Assembly – 36th AD

Fred W. Thiele, Jr.
Member of Assembly – 1st AD

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions