



Promoting Health Through Organic Agriculture As A Leading Sustainable Organization

February 10, 2014

Dear Members of the House Rules Committee,

We are writing to offer comment on House Bill 4100.

Organically Grown Company (OGC), headquartered in Eugene, Or was founded over 30 years ago and is now the largest distributor of organic fruits and vegetables in the Pacific Northwest. Our business is owned by regional farmers and over 200 employees. Currently, OGC works with more than 500 grower/vendors and serves over 250 natural and fine food stores and restaurants located throughout western Oregon and Washington, as well as retail and wholesale accounts in other western states and Canada.

Right to Know is an American Value

Studies show that more than 90% of Americans support mandatory labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods.¹ ABC News stated, “Such near-unanimity in public opinion is rare”. Yet for two decades we have been denied that right.

While Oregonians’ reasons for wanting to know what’s in our food may vary—health, safety, religious, environmental concerns, and/or marketability concerns—what unifies us is the belief that it’s our right to know. Without labeling of GE foods, we cannot make informed choices about our food, and choice is a core American value.

Others Already Label and It is Easy to Do

Unlike most other developed countries –the European Union, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Russia and even China – the U.S. has no laws requiring labeling of genetically engineered foods. *Why not here?* As a food distributor, we know that companies often change their labels for a variety of reasons. This bill would give close to 2 years to phase in the new labeling requirements, so the costs could be incorporated into other planned packaging changes and not passed onto consumers.

Our Concerns about GE

The majority of GE crops are designed to be resistant to commercial herbicides allowing the crop to tolerate more spraying; GE crops have been credited with an increase of 527 million pounds² of herbicide use in the U.S. (1996- 2011). In August of 2011, the US Geological Survey³ reported that glyphosate (the active ingredient in “Roundup”) is now present in the air / rain in the Midwest during the growing season. As a result of widespread use of genetically modified herbicide tolerant crops, populations of weeds have developed

¹ <http://justlabelit.org/faqs>

² www.enveurope.com/content/24/1/24

³ <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2909>

resistance to herbicides⁴ are now becoming prolific in 26 states, causing farmers to need to revert to using older and more toxic herbicides like 2,4-D⁵.

Reports from National Academy of Sciences studies have stated that genetically engineered crops have the potential to introduce new toxins and allergens into our food and environment. Yet unlike the strict safety evaluations for approval of new drugs, there are no mandatory clinical trials of genetically engineered crops for human health risks.

According to Failure to Yield⁶, a report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, despite two decades of research and commercialization, genetic engineering has failed to significantly increase crop yields. A plethora of global studies reveal that modern non-GE breeding methods that use improved understanding of crop biology, as well as newer production methods that utilize low input sustainable farming practices can alleviate hunger, reduce dependency on fossil fuels and chemicals, and build healthier communities far better than GE crops can.

For these reasons we urge the House Rules Committee to recommend pass with a “yes” vote HB 4100 on to the Legislature to be voted on. Oregonians have a right to make informed choices about the food we consume.

Thank you for consideration of these comments,

Natalie Reitman-White

Organically Grown Company

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/19/us-monsanto-superweeds-idUSTRE78I4BA20110919>

⁵ One of the ingredients in the Vietnam War era defoliant Agent Orange, known to cause reproductive problems, birth defects, and increased risk of cancer.

⁶ http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/our-failing-food-system/genetic-engineering/failure-to-yield.html