

Feb 11, 2014

To: House Rules Committee
Re: HB 4100
900 Court Street NE, Room HR 50
Salem, OR, 97301

From: Karen Swift, Biosafety Alliance
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Dear Chair Hoyle and Members of the Committee,

I encourage you to support HB 4100 to give Oregonians the right to make informed decisions about the foods we purchase and feed our families and ourselves. Labeling provides each individual with the necessary information to make an informed purchasing choice. Labeling neither advocates for nor opposes genetic engineering, but simply gives consumers the right to make an informed decision. Labeling foods containing genetically engineered ingredients is simple, and is not going to increase the cost of food. Over 91% of Americans would like to know whether or not the food they eat has been genetically engineered. Over sixty four countries around the world already label genetically engineered food.

Below, I highlight a number of concerns with the use of genetic engineering within our food supply to provide a backdrop of some of the reasons that over 91% of people in the United States would like to have genetically engineered foods labeled.

- 1) In the United States, neither the environmental nor health impacts of GE crops are regulated. The safety assessment of genetically engineered food is voluntary, not required by law and the data we do have on the health and safety impacts is provided by industry. Until conclusive evidence has been presented to know how the use of genetic engineering in our foods affects our health and environment, we should have the opportunity to decide what we choose to consume.
- 2) For various religious and cultural reasons, some people are opposed to the manipulation of seeds in a way that cannot occur in nature. Genetic engineering is the direct manipulation of an organisms genome with the introduction of a trait that does not occur in nature.
- 3) Others do not endorse the patenting of life. Most genetically engineered food cultivated in the US is protected by proprietary patents.

- 4) Most genetically engineered crops (approximately 84% worldwide¹) contain herbicide resistant traits and have contributed to an increase in herbicide use. As a result of this, given genetically engineered crops can cross pollinate with other wild plants of the same species, a formidable superweed problem has emerged. This has led to increased applications of toxic herbicides such as glyphosate and an increased cost for farmers.
- 5) The use of genetic engineering within agriculture has allowed for private market consolidation of a number of commodity crops such as corn, soy, and cotton. Eighty percent of the corn and ninety percent of soybean and cotton grown in the US uses Monsanto traits.² Monsanto uses only a select few varieties, eroding diversity of seeds within the food system. Globally, as of 2008, the world's top 10 seed companies control 67% of the world's proprietary seed market.³ This both reduces choice for farmers, generally increases cost, and decreases diversity of the world's seed supply and varieties of crops. Diversity of seed varieties is important for agricultural resilience, with diverse varieties able to withstand different types of pests and diseases.

That said, this bill is not about banning or presenting genetically engineered foods in an unfavorable light. Rather, it is about giving the consumer the opportunity to make an informed purchasing decision through requiring the labeling of genetically engineered foods.

Thank you for your sincere consideration to support HB 4100,

Sincerely,
Karen Swift

¹ See Center for Food Safety, Revised Comments delivered at the Aug. 1, 2007 Meeting of the USDA's Advisory Comm. on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agric., *Genetically Modified (GM) Crops and Pesticide Use* (Feb. 2009), available at <http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Assets/BOS/GE+Crops+Committee/6.+GM+Crops+and+Pesticide+Use.pdf>.

² See Kristina Hubbard, *Out of Hand: Farmers Face the Consequences of a Consolidated Seed Industry*, (Dec 2009)

³ See ETC GROUP, *Who owns Nature? Communique Issue #100*, (Nov 2009) <<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/who-owns-nature>>.