

February 11, 2014

Oregon State House of Representatives
Rules Committee
Hearing on HB 4100

Testimony of Michael Hansen, Ph.D.
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Dear Chair Hoyle and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 4100, a bill that would allow Oregon citizens to vote on a ballot initiative that would require foods that are produced using genetic engineering (GE) be labeled as such. My name is Michael Hansen and I am a senior scientist at Consumers Union¹ (CU), the policy and advocacy arm of *Consumer Reports*. *Consumer Reports* has over eight million subscribers to its magazine, website, and other publications.

Oregon State's GE food labeling bill, HB 4100, would allow Oregon citizens to vote on a ballot initiative that would require that foods that are produced using GE are labeled as such. If passed via legislation and via voters, this bill would provide the consumers of Oregon with the right to know how their food is produced.

There is global agreement that genetic engineering (GE) differs from conventional breeding, and that safety assessments should be completed for all GE foods, including crops and animals, prior to marketing. The human safety problems that may arise from GE include introduction of new allergens or increased levels of naturally occurring allergens, of plant toxins, and changes in nutrition. There may also be unintended effects. Codex Alimentarius, the food safety standards organization of the United Nations, has developed a set of documents on this topic.

Unlike other developed countries, the US does not require genetically engineered foods to be proven safe before they can go on the market, despite significant safety concerns. A review of the scientific literature shows there are still open questions about the safety of genetically engineered foods, with independent studies finding some evidence of adverse effect, while other studies, often funded by industry or performed by industry-affiliated scientists, tend to find no safety problem. But even if all reasonable safety testing were required, certain individuals could still have unusual allergic responses that would not be detected beforehand. Finally there can be unexpected effects--just as there are sometimes to pharmaceutical products, despite extensive premarket testing. For all these reasons, it is important to label genetically engineered food, so negative effects can be noticed and

¹ Consumers Union is the public policy and advocacy division of Consumer Reports. Consumers Union works for telecommunications reform, health reform, food and product safety, financial reform, and other consumer issues. Consumer Reports, a non-profit, is the world's largest independent product-testing organization. Using its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center, the nonprofit rates thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 8 million subscribers to its magazine, website, and other publications.

identified, and so consumers who simply want to avoid these news foods can do so if they wish.

In sum, the intention of HB 4100 is to allow Oregon citizens to vote for an initiative that would require that foods that are produced using GE be labeled as such. The initiative is intended to provide Oregon consumers with information about the foods they purchase that is currently hidden. This will provide Oregonians with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about the foods they purchase and consume, and to identify any potential health problems that may arise from consumption of such foods.

Consumers Union strongly supports passage of HB 4100.

Sincerely,



Michael Hansen, Ph.D.

Senior Scientist

Consumers Union