



Feb. 12, 2014 testimony of Rebecca Landis, OFMA & CAFM
Chair Hoyle and members of the House Rules Committee:

I am testifying for HB 4100 on behalf of the Oregon Farmers' Markets Association, which represents 120+ farmers' markets and works on behalf of the small farmers who make our farmers' markets the envy of much of the nation.

I also represent Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets, which has a prohibition on products grown from genetically engineered plant and animal material. We did this when GE sweet corn seed emerged – the first threat to farmers' market crops. Transgenic pigs were also on the horizon.

A key quality of farm direct marketing is face-to-face contact of farmers and customers. We don't need a focus group to know our customers don't want our farmers growing and raising GE foods. Labeling becomes much more important when sales are not face-to-face, and the label is the customer's only ready source of information.

Although a federal labeling law might be better for big food companies, the FDA will be unmoveable until enough state laws create the tipping point. Big food companies are pouring money into state elections to stave off this process. They are also proposing sham alternatives to FDA.

If they have megabucks to pour into elections, they can afford a few label alterations – which they execute constantly for their own reasons. They label GMOs for European and other markets, and they can do it for us. The cardboard box mostly contains marketing and profit.

For businesses not exempt based on volume or gross sales, the federal government mandates a host of labeling requirements. As a food savvy consumer, some of those mandated disclosures are less important to me than knowing whether potatoes are carrying the Bt toxin in every blessed cell or whether corn was engineered to take endless dosings of glyphosate or 2,4-d. The jar of peanut butter in my fridge by law must warn me that it contains peanuts and might also have traces of soy and tree nuts. What a shock: peanut butter contains peanuts!

I had to pay extra for that jar because it is certified organic. It's callous to say that consumers should just buy organic or non-GMO verified labels if they want to avoid GMOs. Consumers who care are not all well-connected urban people with access to those labels for every food they eat.

When it comes to how food is raised and what they are putting in their own bodies, the customer is pretty much always right.

Consumers might have religious and/or ethical concerns. They might believe in the precautionary principle. They might want to protect farm workers from pesticides. They might want to protect the rights of farmers whose livelihoods are threatened by genetic drift or predatory economic practices of the companies who sell GE seeds. They might say it's smart to have data to track whether there are adverse health reactions. We didn't consent to participating in this huge science experiment.

Oregon should respect the right of consumers to vote with their food budget. You can vote yes and go on buying GE foods if you like. Please give Oregonians some control over their plates.