

February 12, 2014

Oregon State House of Representatives
Rules Committee
Hearing on HB 4100

Testimony of Julia DeGraw, Northwest Organizer, Food & Water Watch

Dear Chair Hoyle and members of the committee,

Food & Water Watch is a non-profit organization that advocates for common sense policies that will result in healthy, safe food and access to safe and affordable drinking water. Everyone is dependent on shared resources like clean water, safe food and healthy oceans. It's essential that these shared resources be regulated in the public interest rather than for private gain. Our staff, located in 15 offices in the United States, works with a range of constituencies to inform and hold policymakers accountable. Our international staff in Latin America and the European Union (where we are known as Food & Water Europe) work with coalition partners to track the global impact of U.S. corporations on public policy. We have nearly 20,000 supporters in the state of Oregon.

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

Genetically engineered foods are almost entirely untested, unlabeled, and potentially unsafe. A majority of processed foods include genetically modified (GMO) ingredients, which have not been tested for long-term impacts on human health and environmental safety. Additionally, the Food and Drug Administration does no independent safety testing and instead relies on data submitted by biotechnology companies. Furthermore because foods containing GMO ingredients aren't required to be labeled, consumers don't even know when they are eating them.

The biotechnology industry spent over half a billion dollars in lobbying and campaign contributions between 1999 and 2009 to ensure that regulatory oversight of GMO foods remain watered down, GMO foods remain unlabeled, and consumers are kept in the dark. With that kind of national lack of oversight it is even more important that states take this issue on by making GMO food labeling the law.

GMO foods can pose risks to consumers from potential allergens and toxins, but those are not currently disclosed to consumers. Just as labels list fat, sodium and sugar, they should tell the buyer whether or not the product includes potentially harmful GMO ingredients.

Polls show that a vast majority of consumers want food containing GMO ingredients to be labeled, but most large food companies will continue to ignore consumers' demands that GMO foods be labeled until they are held accountable by law. A bill like HB 4100 will give Oregon consumers the right to choose whether or not they want to purchase and feed GMO food to their

families. With the vast majority of American's supporting the right to know what is in their food, if passed HB 4100 will be on the right side of history.

Oregon will be on the right side of history and in the good company of the 64 countries that already label genetically engineered foods. Labeling GMO foods in other countries did not cause the price of food to go up nor did it confuse consumers, as those that oppose GMO food labeling would have us believe. The label simply gave the consumers of those countries the power to make their own choices about whether or not to purchase and eat GMO foods.

We all deserve the right to know what is in our food and to decide whether or not to consume GMO foods—which is why Food & Water Watch supports Oregon State's GMO food labeling Bill (HB 4100).

Thank you for your consideration and your Yes vote on HB 4100.

Sincerely,

Julia DeGraw, Northwest Organizer, Food & Water Watch
