

Free market view of California Prop 37

When Californians go to the polls this November, one of the ballot initiatives they will vote on will be the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act, a proposed law that would require that foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) be specially labeled. This move for mandatory labeling is just the latest development in the ongoing controversy over the safety of genetically modified (GM) foods.

Proponents of the technology argue that creating GM plants and animals for human consumption is essentially no different from the selective breeding that farmers have carried out for millennia, which resulted in accumulated genetic changes over time. But the methods used to create today's genetically modified organisms allow for more rapid and dramatic changes. Modern GMOs are often created using recombinant DNA techniques in which an organism's genes are directly altered, often by inserting DNA fragments from other organisms. This approach offers much greater precision than selective breeding, removing the requirement of several generations of breeding for a particular trait to become widespread in a population. It also allows for the direct addition to an organism of novel traits that do not occur naturally in the species.

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