

## Sustainability expert Ramez Naam: Yes on labels, but No on I-522

Ramez Naam, technology expert and author of the best-selling book [\*The Infinite Resource: The Power of Ideas on a Finite Planet\*](#), has emerged as a controversial figure in the debate over GMO labeling. Although he is a strong supporter of crop biotechnology—read his two part series ([Part 1](#), [Part II](#)) in the Genetic Literacy project—he has come out in favor of labeling.

“[B]y *fighting* labeling, we’re feeding energy to the opponents of GMOs,” he has [written](#). “We’re inducing *more* fear and paranoia of the technology, rather than less. We’re persuading those who might otherwise have no opinion on GMOs that there *must* be something to hide, otherwise, why would we fight so hard to avoid labeling?”

Naam has now taken an interesting position on Washington State’s I-522. He again advocates for GMO labeling, but says that this particular measure is not the right way to inform consumers.

While most countries that label GMO foods add the information to the ingredients section of a package, I-522 would require it to be placed “conspicuously on the front of the package.” Because crops have been deemed as safe as their non-GMO counterparts, Naam argues, a grossly conspicuous label would mislead consumers into believing that there is something inherently dangerous about GMOs. In contrast, sugar and fat content, which have proven links to health problems, contributing to hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, are listed inconspicuously under ‘ingredients’ on packaged goods.

That health and safety asymmetry makes no sense, he concludes. I-522’s mandated labels are not “a reasonable attempt to inform consumers,” but merely a scare tactic in a larger movement against genetic modification.

*[G]iven the huge demand for it, I support labeling all foods that contain genetically modified ingredients. Giving consumers that added information—in a place and manner consistent with other ingredient information—is a good thing that can help consumers regain a sense of control and reduce unnecessary fear of genetically modified foods.*

*Doing so on the front of the package, though, where virtually nothing else is required, while far more lethal ingredients are mandated only on the back, sends an entirely different message. That would call out GMOs in a way that’s dramatically out of proportion to the real risk, and far beyond what’s needed for consumer choice.*

Read the full, original story here: [“No on 522: Label GMOs, But Not This Way”](#)

### Additional Resources:

- [“Labels for GMO Foods Are a Bad Idea,”](#) Scientific American
- “Why we need to label GMOs,” Mark Lynas