

Can botched handling of the trans-fats controversy shed light on the GMO labeling debate?

Blunders by the federal government concerning labeling of trans-fats could offer some insight into the GMO labeling debate, writes Steve Savage, agricultural scientist and plant pathologist.

In the 1990s, Congress had passed the Nutritional Labeling and Education Act, but never funded the 'education' half of the bill, leading to "black box" nutrition facts that are useless to consumers and that "did nothing to stem the disinformation on the front, marketing-oriented labels."

When the 'low-fat' fad was at its peak in the latter half of the 20th century, food companies started to use labels claiming that partially hydrogenated soybean oil was a 'healthy' alternative to animal fats. Eventually, evidence began to emerge that trans-fats are dangerous to human health, and in 2006 the FDA required labeling of trans-fats. Now, the FDA has decided to remove trans-fats from its list of foods "generally recognized as safe."

So, did we learn from the low fat marketing experience? Seemingly not much. Instead we have continued down the path of magical thinking about food. We go through fad after fad about what single bad actor ingredient to avoid or what magical good component to eat, somehow believing that these simplistic formulas can put us on the path to health. The press, various celebrities and "experts" are often guilty of over-selling such ideas as they emerge incompletely formed from the fields of nutrition or medicine. Well-meaning or simply opportunistic food marketers are then more than willing to follow or even promote each fad. I call that "the marketing of non-existence." We continue to be sold new non-existence options such as "Low Carb," "no High Fructose Corn Syrup," "Gluten-Free," and "non-GMO." These are dietary strategies based on the mindset that foods are something to be feared or at least viewed with suspicion.

Read the full, original story here: [What Trans-fats Should Teach Us About The Pitfalls of Food Labeling](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Label GMOs, but not this way](#), Ramez Naam
- [Labels could disarm the emotional and political triggers of GMOs](#), Grist