

Consumer Union's Michael Hansen accused of misleading legislators on GMO safety

The ideologically driven, anti-technology campaign to restrict access to safe, sustainable and affordable foods improved through biotechnology got a boost when Vermont Governor Pete Shumlin signed into law a new measure that mandates the labeling of foods modified through genetic engineering sold in Vermont.

To test the misleading statements and mischaracterizations of the labeling campaigners I present testimony below from Michael Hansen, Ph.D., Senior Scientist with the Consumers Union. This testimony was presented as part of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs and Protection's Public Hearing on the Use of Biotechnology in Foods and the Effects on Consumers at Lehman College, on Tuesday, July 30, 2013.

As I will discuss in my testimony, ...unlike other developed countries, the U.S. does not require genetically engineered foods to be proven safe before they can go on the market despite significant safety concerns. But even if all reasonable safety testing were required, certain individuals could still have unusual allergic or other adverse responses that would not be detected beforehand. There could also be unexpected effects, just as there sometimes are with pharmaceutical products, despite extensive premarket testing. For all these reasons, it's important to label genetically engineered foods so negative effects can be noticed and identified and so consumers who simply want to avoid these new foods can do so if they wish.

These claims are either factually incorrect or misleading. FDA requires all foods placed on the market in the United States to be safe. This requirement applies equally to "bioengineered" foods and all others. The claim of "significant safety concerns" is false, robustly contradicted by the scientific literature, worldwide scientific opinion, and vast experience. Unlike conventional or organic foods, bioengineered foods are routinely screened in the US and other industrial nations (per regulations rooted in the OECD guidelines) to ensure they contain no toxins or known allergens.

The claim, therefore, that labeling is needed to inform consumers of potential hazards is not only unfounded, but the opposite of the truth: the only safety differential ever reported between bioengineered and other foods shows the bioengineered foods to be safer. As a final comment, while proponents of labeling measures such as those supported here by Hansen most often claim they seek mandatory labels to enable consumer choice, or to address safety issues, it has been noted that the effects of such labeling mandates would advance the financial interests of the major funders of these labeling efforts.

Read the full, original article: [Consumers Union Makes False Claims Against the Safety of Genetically Modified Foods Based On Ideology Not Science](#)