

## GMO labels: When having more information can be bad

There are a variety of contexts where the government mandates the kind of information that companies must put on their goods. An important and common misconception when thinking about mandatory labels is thinking that the mandated disclosure of information is neutral.

However, the information being conveyed to consumers is not simply the facts the government mandate says they must display, but THAT they say these facts must be displayed. In other words, when a consumer is confronted by what appears to be a mandated label they reasonably presume a few things:

- 1) direct content: a particular fact or set of facts about the product
- 2) implied content: the fact or facts are important for consumers to know for some reason

It can be the case that the direct content is absolutely true and implied content is absolutely false. For example, a food may be factually labeled as containing GMOs in a way that provides consumers truthful information. This is truthful direct content. However, the consumer is also likely to take from the existence of this label that “this food containing GMOs is important information that you should know”. This is the implied content, and from it consumers may reasonably conclude a few things.

One is that the GMO content of foods is something the government believes consumers may want to consider in their consumption decisions. The label mandate sends the signal to consumers that the government believes the GMO critics are correct and have won this debate. It’s certainly the case that people pushing for GMO labels are also trying to convince the public that GMOs are unsafe. And so through their other activism they are creating conditions that make it more likely the implied content of GMO labels would be misleading.

Long story short, label mandates are never merely conveying facts, and the information is not neutral. The mandates are also conveying that the facts are important. Those who wish to push for mandates like this should prove the importance and not use the mandate as a way to convince consumers of an argument about importance that they haven’t won.

**Read the full, original article:** [GMO Labels: How Can More Information Make Consumers Worse Off?](#)