

Vermont's law requiring GMO labels could trigger nationwide rules

Under a law signed this month, the tiny New England state, population 626,000, will soon require that food companies tell consumers which products on grocers' shelves have genetically modified ingredients. In doing so, Vermont could force food growers, processors and retailers to upend how they serve hundreds of millions of customers nationwide.

The law puts Vermont at the forefront of a national movement that major food processors and agricultural companies are doing their utmost to kill. But although the industry has won several major battles on the issue — including ballot initiative campaigns in California in 2012 and in Washington state last year — the national push for GMO labeling has proved a resilient grass-roots effort, given added push by a broad swath of celebrity chefs, food writers and actors.

"Consumers want to know what is in their food," Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin said. "Elected officials will have to meet the demands of consumers or be rejected at the ballot box. There is no doubt in my mind this will spread across the country."

The issue is thorny for President Obama, who expressed support for GMO labels during an Iowa campaign stop in 2007. A YouTube clip of Obama's comments posted by advocates has been viewed 840,000 times. The president does not need Congress to act. The FDA, whose head is appointed by the president, has the authority to mandate the labels.

For more than 2 1/2 years, the agency has delayed acting on the most prominent petition calling for GMO labels, filed by the Center for Food Safety.

Allies of the big agricultural companies responded recently with a measure of their own that would strip states of authority to mandate the labels. The measure, by Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.), would also prohibit the FDA from mandating labels absent concrete findings that specific foods are unsafe. Pompeo said he worries a patchwork of different state and local labeling rules would wreak havoc on food suppliers.

"We could be talking about thousands of different jurisdictions making their own decisions about food laws," Pompeo said. "That is not a functional food safety system."

The point is not lost on advocates of labeling. It is, in fact, part of their strategy. Once a few states impose the requirement, they say, major food and agricultural companies and the FDA will be compelled to negotiate an agreement for a national standard.

"We could have as many as five states by the end of this year with mandatory labeling," said Colin O'Neil, director of government affairs at the Center for Food Safety. "Is the FDA going to allow them to dictate national policy, or will they step in with a federal blueprint? I suspect we are not going to see a patchwork go on much longer before the feds step in."

Read the full, original article: [Vermont's new GMO law may upend food industry nationwide](#)