

GMO ice cream war: Ben & Jerry's and parent Unilever at odds over GMO labeling

With Ben & Jerry's CEO Jostein Solheim at his side, Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin signed the nation's first law requiring labeling of foods made with GMO ingredients. Ben & Jerry's support of the law — a swirl of savvy public relations, financial backing, and grassroots activism — pits the ice cream maker against the world's biggest food companies, including its own corporate parent. Unilever has openly opposed state efforts to legislate GMO labeling, throwing money into campaigns to defeat an initiative in California. But it has quietly allowed Ben & Jerry's to assert itself as a vocal proponent of such laws, especially in Vermont.

"I don't think they will ever want the potentially massive negative PR of trying to silence B&J," said Andrew Wood, an analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein.

If Unilever tries to play both sides of the issue, it may wind up hurting itself and Ben & Jerry's. "In the short run, they might get away with ignoring what B&J is doing, but sooner or later it will catch up with them," said Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition and public health at New York University and the author of "Food Politics," a book about how the food industry influences nutrition policy.

Ben & Jerry's has never shied away from speaking out on social issues, and Unilever, since acquiring the company in 2000, has not interfered. Since 1985, Ben & Jerry's has donated a portion of its profits to community projects across the U.S. In 1996, the company sued the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois for the right to label its products as free of recombinant bovine growth hormone, which is given to cows to boost milk production. A condition of Unilever's acquisition was that Ben & Jerry's would have a separate board of directors not chosen by its owner.

Read the full, original article: [Ben & Jerry's throws fudge brownie into GMO food fight](#)