

Despite big spending, food industry not winning GM labeling debate

Despite two decades of assurances from biotechnology firms, food processors, federal regulators and even a substantial share of scientists that GMO foods are safe, ballot initiatives and citizen petitions seeking labels on GMO foods are springing up as quickly as the industry can pay — or sue — to defeat them. Meanwhile, sales of foods labeled GMO-free have been steadily gaining ground on consumer shopping lists, and polls suggest that more Americans than ever favor labels that identify GMO foods.

This has even some supporters of genetic engineering wondering if it's time to rethink the labeling question. "If you give people a choice and value, that wins," said David Ropeik, a risk-communication consultant. He has begun calling on the industry to let go of its "fear of fear" and embrace GMO labeling, which is required in at least 64 other nations, including Japan, Australia, Russia, Brazil and more than a dozen European countries.

But Duane Grant, who runs farms in Idaho and northern Oregon, and many industry stakeholders remain skeptical. "To allow popular perception of harm — or benefit — to be the basis for mandatory labeling would not result in food being safer," he argued. "It would result in the scientific community being pushed to the sidelines in favor of food-fad-of-the-day mob regulation."

Whether or not that's true, food makers are spending lavishly to avoid mandatory GMO labels. The industry justifies all these expenditures on a variety of grounds. For starters, companies say, a hodgepodge of differing state labeling laws would be unworkable, and even a federal labeling rule would make food more expensive. They also argue that genetic modification, which involves the insertion of foreign genes into an organism — so far mostly crops like corn and soy — so that it expresses a new and ostensibly desirable trait, is really just one among a variety of plant breeding techniques that have been used for decades without complaint.

Read full, original article: [In the war over GMO labeling, Big Food loses the PR battle](#)