Andrew Kimbrell vs Nina Fedoroff: Should GMO foods be labeled?

One of the biggest arguments in the food world these days involves products that have been genetically modified.

Consumer advocates have been pushing for rules requiring companies to label foods that contain ingredients that have been modified for any number of purposes, such as making them resistant to herbicides. Recently, voters in Oregon and Colorado voted down measures to require labeling. Other states, though, have approved labeling, and the Food and Drug Administration's website says it has received petitions to mandate labeling nationwide but hasn't made a call on the idea.

Andrew Kimbrell, the executive director of the Center for Food Safety, makes the case in favor of labeling. Arguing against labeling is Nina Fedoroff, the Pugh professor emerita at Penn State University.

YES: We Deserve To Know What's in the Food We Eat

By Andrew Kimbrell

The American public has the right to know what's in the food they buy and serve their families. That includes the right to choose whether or not to purchase foods produced through genetic engineering. Consumers in 64 other countries have that right, and Americans overwhelmingly want that right. Most polls show that more than 90% of the public favors labeling.

Why label? Genetically engineered foods are materially different than their nonengineered counterparts, and the public has a right to know it. In fact, the DNA in these foods has been patented by biotech corporations as completely new.

Labeling would not be curtailing a technology that is beneficial to the public. No currently commercialized genetically engineered crop substantially increases yield or nutrition. And other cheaper, proven methods are more effective at increasing production.

Moreover, genetic engineering is not safer, nor more efficient nor more predictable than traditional breeding. Genetically engineering crops involves trial and error, mostly resulting in failure. Tinkering with a plant's DNA might make a nontoxic plant toxic or have other unintended impacts. Without labeling, we can't fully track those impacts.

NO: It's Simply a Ploy to Make Consumers Worry

By Nina Fedoroff

Genetically modified crops have increased yields by an average of more than 20% globally. (The increases are higher for small-holder farmers in less-developed nations than for big farmers in more

developed nations because they start from a lower yield level.) And it is not true that other cheaper, proven methods are more effective at increasing production. In places that use only conventional methods, yields have stagnated.

Compare the resistance to genetically modified crops with organically grown food. A meta-analysis from Stanford University of papers published on the subject over a 50-year period concluded that there were no significant nutritional differences between conventionally and organically grown foods. However, organic produce is 10 times more likely to be recalled for bacterial contamination than conventionally grown food.

And the recent claims about glyphosate, the herbicidal ingredient in Roundup? U.S. and European regulatory agencies have repeatedly concluded that glyphosate is safe, neither toxic nor carcinogenic. Herbicide-tolerant crops benefit us all by reducing topsoil loss and CO_2 emissions from plowing and cultivation.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Should Companies Be Required to Label Genetically Modified Foods?