

Nature Editorial: 'Appeasing US anti-GMO movement by agreeing to labeling will likely backfire'

Although a US law mandating disclosure of GM ingredients provides food companies with a way out of the labeling rabbit hole, appeasing the anti-GM movement will likely backfire.

It has been called “the Munich agreement of food labeling,” a “capitulation to the organic lobby” and a “scam for scaring consumers.” It has also been called a “triumph for transparency and the right-to-know,” a “win-win agreement for every family in every US state” and a welcome end to “confusion in the marketplace.” The recently passed National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard (S.764) is a pragmatic victory in the fight to preempt the organic lobby’s concerted campaign to purge genetically modified (GM) ingredients from the US market through flawed state food labeling initiatives. But it is a pyrrhic victory: it codifies into US law a nonsensical category that discriminates one particular food production technology from all others. Codification not only legitimizes unscientific anti-GM prejudice, but also saddles US consumers with higher food bills.

The tragedy is that consumers don’t know what’s coming. The majority who don’t care about GM status will now have to pay the price for the minority who do. Not a big deal for people who already pay a premium for organic food. But for Americans who struggle to meet their weekly food bills, even small price increases could break their budgets. Who in Washington is listening to them?

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