

TESTIMONY FOR GMO LABELING

My name is Tara Cook-Littman and I am first and foremost a mother of three young children. I am also a former New York City Prosecutor and most recently received my certification as a Holistic Health Counselor from the Integrative Institute for Nutrition based in New York. I am currently the chair elect to a PTA Council Committee in Fairfield, CT called Fuel For Learning Partnership which, through educational programming and policy work, is informing the public on health issues and is working on improving the quality of food served through the Fairfield School Lunch Program to our children. I also currently have a blog called Tara Cook Littman Real Food For Real Life, where I am encouraging people to get back to basics, stop eating their food out of boxes and eat fresh, real food.

I was inspired to become a health counselor after I overcame my own health issues through changes in my diet. I took personal responsibility for my health by ensuring that I knew what I was eating. I learned that there were certain foods I needed to avoid to help me feel better. At the same time I was dealing with my health issues, my son developed an allergy to all nuts at the age of six. Being able to read labels on the food we were eating became my most powerful tool in protecting myself, my son and the rest of my family. For the most part, labeling was very clear. I avoided anything with wheat and gluten for myself, and anything that contained nuts for my son. Having clear labels on our food literally became a lifesaver.

I am not standing before you asking that genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, be banned. Rather, I simply ask that you support CT HB 5117 and require that foods containing GMOs be labeled. While there may be disagreement as to whether GMOs are dangerous, from my perspective, the lack of FDA testing on the effects of GMOs, the requirement in Europe that all GMOs be labeled, the scientific evidence that has been collected thus far and my own personal experience in feeling better once I stopped eating GMOs was sufficient for me to decide that I did not want my family eating GMOs. Also, as part of my health counseling, I am educating my clients on how to avoid GMOs and teaching classes and workshops that include this same information.

The problem is that for those who decide to avoid GMOs it is actually quite complicated to do so because of the lack of labeling. The best ways to avoid GMOs are by eating all organic foods or by not eating any processed food because over 80% of all processed foods contain GMOs. However, neither of these options is particularly practical when looking at the current American diet and lifestyle, nor is organic food an option for everyone. The next best way to avoid GMOs is to avoid any food with corn, soybeans, canola, and sugar. I challenge all of you to go to the supermarket and find packaged food without any of those ingredients. Identifying GMOs in food becomes even more difficult because GMOs hide in our food with over 100 aliases including lecithin, glucose, corn syrup, caramel color, starch, xanthum gum, maltodextrin, tofu, vitamin E, gluten, protein and so on. As you can see, it can be extremely difficult to identify GMOs and trying to educate someone on avoiding

them can easily dominate an entire session with one of my private clients and can take over the question and answer period at my seminars. And, even once I have educated my clients and audiences I speak to, it still remains very challenging for them to successfully identify all foods that contain GMOs. Why should we as the consumer need an advanced degree in identifying GMOs? It should be simple. The only way for it to be simple is to have the foods clearly labeled.