

Testimony Presented to the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

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HB 6519—An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, Senator Welch, Representative Srinivasan and other members of the Public Health Committee.

I'm Paul Pescatello, President of Connecticut United for Research Excellence—CURE.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 6519—An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food.

CURE's mission is to represent and foster the growth of Connecticut life sciences research and life sciences technology transfer.

Perhaps our most important job is to support growth of the cluster of biotechnology and biopharma companies that CURE and all of you in the General Assembly have worked so hard to build.

As we try to underscore at every opportunity, biotech is first and foremost about cures and treatments and better ways of producing energy and food, but is also about economic development.

There are many ways to measure the important economic impact of biotech but most telling is its economic multiplier effect. CURE's own studies, as well as those of many other organizations and government agencies, consistently show that biotech has about the greatest economic multiplier of any industry.

Simply put, investment in biotech, whether by private investors or governments—like Governor Malloy's recent recruitment of Jackson Laboratories to Connecticut—will have the greatest ripple effect across the Connecticut economy in terms of jobs and employment than any other industry.

I am here today to oppose HB 6519 on many grounds.

Most are stated in the many letters and other information provided to this committee.

There are two key facts.

One, the existing rules, regulations and oversight of the FDA make the bill unnecessary. Pages and pages of audited scientific studies are submitted to the FDA as part of the regulatory dossier.

Two, the “organic” labeling option means, by definition, that no genetically engineered seeds or crop were used in organic food production. HB 6519 would only confuse rather than enlighten consumers.

But the most important reason for CURE’s opposition to HB 6519 is that it undermines the foundation, the hospitable environment, for biotech we’ve worked so hard to build in Connecticut.

As we—you—did so astutely with stem cell research, we looked beyond the confusion and anti-science rhetoric that our opponents sought to create and crafted legislation that broadcast to the world Connecticut’s openness to science, rational analysis and the high technology job opportunities of the 21st century.

There are many things to be said about genetically engineered/modified foods, but their essential quality is that they are nutritionally identical to non-GE derived foods. Biotech helps us produce more food using *less* land and *fewer* pesticides, with a much *lower* carbon footprint, but the food itself is no different from food produced “the old fashioned way.”

To the extent food is modified in such a way that it is nutritionally different or has the potential to expose consumers to allergens, existing law requires that it be labeled as such.

Today biotechnology as it is applied to food production is part of a centuries-long continuum of using science—from monks employing Medelian genetics to Nobel Laureate Norman Borlang’s post World War II green revolution. The science of food production has allowed us to feed the hungry and free most of us from the need to farm—allowing us to use our time, talents and treasure for other pursuits. The use of biotechnology in food production is a very good thing. It is something to be proud of, not to affix a scarlet letter to.

Connecticut is a high cost state but one with much high value added intellectual property to sell to the world. The high living standards we enjoy in Connecticut depend on our creating more of that intellectual property. We must continue to be confidently known as hospitable to science and rational analysis, and as a state that welcomes scientific research and researchers.

HB 6519 would undermine that message and should be opposed.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have or expand on any points I’ve made.