

March 15, 2013

Public Health Committee

**RE: HB 6519** An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food.

From: Theresa Velenzas & Family, Glastonbury CT 860-478-7430

Good Morning Committee Chairs, Co chairs, Ranking Members and Members of the Public Health Committee.

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My name is Theresa Velenzas and I am here today with my family Demetres, Melina, and Philip along with several friends from our town of Glastonbury to urge you to support HB 6519 An Act Concerning the Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food.

I want to start out by thanking those of you who support labeling and who are working tirelessly to propel Connecticut forward and have us be a leader in this change that is sweeping the nation as State after State proposes labeling bills. Right now, Hawaii and Vermont have made great strides in passing labeling legislation and it would make me incredibly proud to know that my State is part of this change. It would also give me some peace of mind as a consumer, who does the primary shopping to feed my family that we are able to demand transparency when it comes to our food.

I must tell you when I discovered the term GMO I was following links on my kindle late one night reading about the problem we face with the bees. From environmental and nutritional articles I came across GMOFreeUSA and discovered that the founder Diana Reeves is from CT, a champion in this cause who has inspired and lead several states including our own to volunteer our time and spread the word. I have had the pleasure of working with GMOFreeCT who have helped me facilitate informational sessions in my community with other parents who share the same concerns. What ARE GMOs? Are they safe? Why did we not know about this? What IS a GRAS rating? How can more than 80% of our processed food contain ingredients that are generally safe as opposed to proven safe? I come here before you, still with these questions, as a mom trying to do what's best for my family.

As if that is not confusing enough, the scientific community cannot agree while companies are unable to produce evidence GMOs are safe. Over 50 countries require labeling or have banned them. Many companies are voluntarily going to GMO free. They are listening to consumers.

None of these summarized arguments are new to you I am sure of it. But as I am here today I feel compelled to share with you that we consumers see the problem. And labeling appears to be the only solution. For if we label, we give the people the power to vote with their dollar while demanding more research. If GMOs are NOT good for us, we should soon know and remove them from our food chain. If they are good, then the

companies producing them get extra advertising, already there on their packaging as seen on products like Smart Balance. We are not here today to ask YOU to be the scientists and solve this complex issue. We are here to ask you to let the people decide. Let the people decide by supporting this labeling bill. If you have any doubt about how to solve this problem or whether or not it IS in fact a problem, please put it in the hands of voters. That is all we ask. Let us decide, and let us demand transparency.

I will close with a compelling piece of information that I received from a friend Nisha Pickett Smith who is a Chemistry and Biology teacher at the high school level here in Connecticut. I have submitted with my testimony a project she does with her sophomore class every year and has been doing for the past 10 years. The students are asked to assess the safety of GMOs. The sophomore students, aged 16 conduct a research project outlined in the attached exhibit titled "Bio Engineered Food" and "GMO Brochure Rubric" related to GMOs and their safety. In 10 years of teaching this class, Ms. Smith states that 98% of her students find through their independent research that GMOs are unsafe. This is part of the CAPT curriculum that students across the state just finished this past week. I have attached a copy of the 2 forms used by the teacher for your review and would be happy to get you in touch with her for further information as she could not be here today.

I'm not qualified to go into details of the classroom projects, nor am I suggesting that we should go by the student's findings to solve this issue. But the question begs to be asked: At the end of the day, how do we tell those students across our State that foods containing GMOs should not be at the very least labeled? What message are we sending these Connecticut students around the State that at the very least their food may be questionable in terms of safety, and that now that we know about it we are doing nothing?

I urge you to support labeling as it is the only step towards progress, towards transparency and towards a solution. It is also the right message to be giving our budding scientists and children, our future generation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I know you have a daunting task ahead of you. From where I sit, the answer is clear and I urge any of you who are undecided to support this labeling bill which will put it back in the hands of voters, where it should be. I also want those of you who are supporting it to know we are here standing with you.

Thank you.  
Theresa Velendzas

# Bio-engineered Food

## Objective:

To assess the risk versus benefit of genetically altered food sources using research to create a persuasive brochure that takes a position in favor of or opposed to labeling genetically altered foods.

## Background:

The advancements in the field of biotechnology have allowed scientists to insert genes into food sources so the altered DNA produces new proteins that lead to new characteristics in the plants. By inserting a gene into a particular plant, the resulting protein may make the plant resistant to insects or resistant to a particular herbicide. The farmers' ability to yield larger crops greatly improves when these alterations are made. Other genetic modifications improve the nutritional quality of food.

Many products you buy at the grocery store including corn, beets, canola and soy are probably genetically modified (genetically modified organisms are called GMOs for short), but you have no way of knowing unless the manufacturer chooses to label the product. Opponents to genetically modified food fear that future studies may uncover health risks linked to ingesting this altered form of DNA. Others suggest that the use of genetically altered plants may result in the overuse of chemicals to control weeds, and ultimately cause adverse environmental conditions. Currently there are no laws that mandate the labeling of genetically modified food products.

**Your task is to design a persuasive pamphlet in support of or in opposition to the mandatory labeling of genetically altered food based on scientific evidence.**

You will need to use several sources to support your stance and remember to consider the credibility of your sources when defending your position.

Here are some websites that will help start your research on the risks and benefits of genetically modified food. Feel free to use books and other internet resources found in the DHS Library

<http://pewagbiotech.org/newsroom/releases/062702.php3>

<http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications>

<http://actionbioscience.org/biotech/>

**Be sure to back up your statements with FACTS (numbers, research findings)**

**You will want to provide answers to some of the following questions**

1. What are the basic scientific facts and procedures used to create GMOs?
2. What are some of the possible ways your product can increase or decrease the quality of life of those who use it? (Does it increase food output per acre of land or cause death/diseases?)
3. Should people change to the "modern" method of farming?
4. Should people be concerned about using genetically modified foods? Why or why not?

**GMO Brochure Rubric**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**The only rule is your brochure must be 8 ½ by 11.**

Beyond the size constraint you may be as creative as you would like (the more the better) you may fold your paper, draw, type, and or decorate your brochure. The goal is to present your findings and cause others to join your point of view.

**You must include a works cited and use parenthetical citations in your brochure.  
The DHS Citations Style Sheet is Available on the Library Website**

	<b>Expected = 5</b>	<b>Acceptable = 4</b>	<b>Substandard – 1</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
<b>Research &amp; information</b>	Multiple resources are used and documented. Essential information is found to support the project. Focus questions are answered. Multiple points of view are evaluated.	At least 5 resources are used and documented. Relevant information is found. Most focus questions are answered. One other point of view was examined.	4 or fewer resources are used. Some sources are not relevant. Focus questions are not researched. Alternate points of view are ignored.		
<b>Content</b>	Information supports the purpose and is accurate and current. Content is persuasive and convincing – backed up with facts and reasons. Logical progression of ideas with clear point of view.	Some of the information is not relevant or is out of date. Includes some persuasive information with few facts or reasons. The point of view is a bit unclear.	Information is incomplete, out of date and/or incorrect. Contains little persuasive information and only one or two facts or reasons. Lacks a clear point of view.		
<b>Mechanics</b>	Visual and written communication is informative & engaging	Written communication is informative.	Visual and/or written communication was not informative or appropriate		
<b>Brochure</b>	Makes effective use of text, graphics. Information is thought provoking. Maximum use of allowed space.	Text and graphics are used. Required information is covered. A clear position is taken but may not be persuasive. Size limits were followed	Text is hard to read, missing and/or uninformative. Brochure is lacking in information. Size limits were ignored		
<b>Citations</b>	A great variety of resources are correctly cited using the DHS style sheet.	Few resources found in research are cited. Minor error made in formatting works cited.	No resources are cited. Major errors made in formatting works cited.		
<b>Total</b>				/ 25	/ 25
<b>There will be no late assignments!!</b>				<b>Grade</b>	