



**Testimony of Tara Cook-Littman
Citizens for GMO Labeling**

in support of

**HB 5300, AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS IN
CHILDREN'S FOOD.**

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
MARCH 3, 2016

My name is Tara Cook-Littman, co-founder of Citizens for GMO Labeling, a CT based national organization committed to supporting individuals and groups fighting for mandatory GMO labeling. We join with advocates from Connecticut to ask you to give your citizens a transparent food system so that they can choose whether or not to feed their families GMOs. A right the citizens of 64 other countries, including all of Europe, Japan, China, New Zealand and Australia already enjoy, but not here in America where we are shopping totally blind. In 2013 CT made history by passing the first in the nation GMO Labeling law, but because of certain contingencies, that law has yet to be implemented. We are urging CT legislators to remove all barriers to implementation so that GMOs can be labeled in CT now.

Since 2013 the landscape of GMO labeling in the United States has changed. Shortly after Connecticut passed our GMO labeling law, Maine followed by passing a similar law. Beginning in July 2016 Vermont citizens will have the right to know what they are eating, but CT residents will still be eating and shopping blind. In 2014 Vermont passed a GMO labeling law with no trigger clause despite that fact that Vermont has less than 1/3 the population of CT. There are currently at least 30 states working toward GMO labeling laws. Most notably, our neighbors in Massachusetts and Rhode Island are poised to pass laws in 2016.

In the Spring of 2015, [World Health Organization's cancer research arm](#), International Agency for Research on cancer, designated the herbicide glyphosate, widely used on GMO crops, as "**probably carcinogenic to humans.**" Glyphosate is the main component of Roundup, the most widely used pesticide in the country. The majority of genetically engineered crops on the market are engineered to be "roundup ready", which means that the crops can be sprayed with Roundup, the weeds will die, but the crops will continue to grow. Genetically engineered crops have led to an increase in overall pesticide use by 404 million pounds from the time they were introduced in 1996 through 2011, according to the report by Charles Benbrook, a research professor at the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources at Washington State University.

Genetically engineered salmon is coming to a plate near you soon and because of the lack of labeling you will have no idea you are eating it. The FDA approval process relies on safety and environmental assessments provided by the manufacturer benefiting from the sale of these genetically engineered salmon, Massachusetts-based AquaBounty Technologies.

People have a myriad of reasons for wanting to know if GMOs are in the food they are eating: health, environmental, religious, cultural, and political to name a few. Why an individual chooses to avoid GMOs, should not matter when considering whether or not to label GMOs. In 2013 CT legislators made it clear that they were acting to pass a GMO labeling law in order to prevent potential health risks, protect the environment, prevent consumer confusion and deception and to protect religious practices. The reasons the CT General Assembly passed the historic GMO Labeling law in 2013 were valid then and are valid now. The only difference is that Connecticut consumers should no longer have to wait.

Public opinion polls consistently show that over 90% of Americans support GMO labeling because consumers want that information in order to make their own purchasing decisions. The first rule of business used to be, "The customer is always right." It now appears our opposition would lead you to believe the new rule is "The customer is not smart enough to understand." We respectfully submit to the committee that consumers are smarter than that.

Since 2013 we have been working with states across the country, and the opposition's arguments against labeling have not changed, and are repeated throughout the country. We are confident that CT legislators will see through the propaganda and rather than listening to the industry that benefits from the sale of GMOs, you will honor the will of your constituents.

COST

You will once again hear from the industry that GMO labeling will increase the cost of food. Many labeling opponents often cite a Cornell study which says consumers would spend \$500 extra per year should a system like this be implemented. Last year the Washington Post "Fact Checker" wrote "It is an exaggeration to use the \$500-per-family figure." As it turns out, the study assumed manufacturers would switch to non-GMO ingredients and labeling itself costs manufacturers next to nothing. This fact was confirmed by Campbell's last month when they announced that they will begin labeling all GMOs in their products, and that they will no longer stand with any coalition fighting against GMO labeling and our right to know. They stated that labeling their products will not increase costs to the company or to consumers.

We all know that labels are changed constantly depending on the marketing trend of the moment. A simple label that states "produced with genetic engineering" is all we are asking for. In Europe, where labeling is mandatory, there was no increase in the cost of food and in many cases is less expensive than in the United States. However, in Europe you will not find many GMO labels because rather than label, the manufacturers decided to reformulate afraid that GMO labeling would be a marketing liability. The opposition is trying to keep us in the dark about what we are eating for one reason and one reason only, they fear that if we knew what we are eating, we might choose not to eat GMOs and that would potentially destroy their profits. We must demand a free and democratic market where consumers can make their own decision about whether to support GMO crops. Individual rights should not be trumped by a corporations' concern for their bottom line.

FEDERAL APPROACH

Many people speak of a federal solution being the answer to this issue. WE AGREE. But in the absence of a strong federal standard, states must act in the interest of their constituents. Our country's history shows that the states, as 'laboratories of democracy' often show our federal government the path by carrying out the will of the people. . While our critics speak of a "patchwork quilt" of state laws, we are working hard to ensure that state laws present a similar standard to reduce the burden on food producers. To this point, we have been successful in CT, ME, and VT.

Most recently, our industry opponents fought to pass legislation that would preempt state legislative efforts while codifying a voluntary federal standard that has led to ZERO labels in the thirteen years it has been in existence. This is not a federal solution, but a smokescreen that would permanently deny consumers from knowing how their food is produced. State legislators everywhere should be outraged that the federal government would attempt to take away their rights to protect the citizens of their own state.

CONSTITUTIONALITY

A lower court in Vermont has already found that GMO labeling laws at the state level are constitutional. It has been suggested by the opposition that state mandated GMO labeling laws are unconstitutional, when, in fact, there has been no such definitive ruling. One of the arguments from those that oppose GMO labeling is that state mandated labeling would violate the First Amendment by infringing on the merchants' commercial free speech rights. In plain English, the industry that benefits from the sale of GMOs, thinks their right to keep us in the dark about what we are eating, so they can continue to profit, trumps our right to know what we are feeding our families. Do legislators actually believe that the framers intended the First Amendment to afford corporations such protections? To the contrary, our framers intent in writing the constitution was to protect the American citizenry from the very abuses of power evidenced in the lack of transparent labeling of our food. As long as the Connecticut legislature can show that the GMO labeling law is reasonably related to numerous legitimate state interests, including health of its' citizens and protecting the environment, the law would be upheld as constitutional. Whether a Connecticut GMO labeling law will survive a constitutional attack, is really up to all of you. What is your intent in supporting your constituents right to know? Please be sure to put your intent on the record.

APPROVAL PROCESS & TESTING

The opposition will tell you that GMOs are perfectly safe and that labeling will confuse the consumer. While the jury may still be out as to whether we can say definitively that GMOs are harming us, I have read enough studies that raise serious doubts in my mind as to whether GMOs should be consumed by anyone. And remember, GMOs were NEVER proven safe by our own government. The FDA relied upon tests performed by the very industry that benefits from the sale of GMOs, something that has become commonly known as cigarette science. Before anyone asks us to prove they are dangerous, go ask our own government to prove they are safe and they will not be able to provide you with one government funded long term study proving they are safe. Our government has failed to protect us. In fact, GMOs were exempt from testing because they were deemed generally recognized as safe (GRAS), many would say illegally.

*"GRAS" is an acronym for the phrase **G**enerally **R**ecognized **A**s **S**afe. Under sections 201(s) and 409 of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (the Act), "any substance that is intentionally*

added to food is a food additive, that is subject to premarket review and approval by FDA, unless the substance is generally recognized, among qualified experts, as having been adequately shown to be safe under the conditions of its intended use, or unless the use of the substance is otherwise excluded from the definition of a food additive under sections 201(s) and 409 of the Act, and FDA's implementing regulations in 21 CFR 170.3 and 21 CFR 170.30, the use of a food substance may be GRAS either through scientific procedures or, for a substance used in food before 1958, through experience based on common use in food.

Under 21 CFR 170.30(b), general recognition of safety through scientific procedures requires the same quantity and quality of scientific evidence as is required to obtain approval of the substance as a food additive and ordinarily is based upon published studies, which may be corroborated by unpublished studies and other data and information.

Under 21 CFR 170.30(c) and 170.3(f), general recognition of safety through experience based on common use in foods requires a substantial history of consumption for food use by a significant number of consumers.”

Genetically engineered foods never met either of the criteria required to be granted GRAS status. Even the FDA's own scientists believed that GMOs could pose potential harm to human health and warned their superiors that GMOs required additional testing before ending up on our dinner plates. It is clear that there will be no action from our federal government at this time because the industry that benefits from the sale of GMOs, has too much power in Washington. States should not wait for the Federal government to act, but rather must protect its' citizens today.

As a movement, we gain momentum and strength every day as more American citizens learn what GMOs are and become angered at how they have been kept in the dark. We cannot allow corporate interests to squash our right to know any longer. Please give the citizens of Connecticut the ability to make their own decisions about what to feed themselves and their families.

CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS HAVE WAITED LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT THEY ARE EATING. WE ARE ASKING FOR THE SIMPLE RIGHT TO BE ABLE TO MAKE OUR OWN EDUCATED DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT WE ARE FEEDING OURSELVES AND OUR FAMILIES. PLEASE REMOVE THE "TRIGGER CLAUSE" and IMPLEMENT CONNECTICUT'S GMO LABELING LAW IMMEDIATELY.

Thank you.