

# Science, not fear, should guide food labeling laws



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A genetically engineered potato poked through the soil of a planting pot in a lab in Idaho.

**By The Editorial Board** AUGUST 03, 2015

CONGRESS CREATED MANDATORY nationwide food labels, and it is Congress that has a responsibility to ensure they don't stray from their original purpose of providing valid health and safety information to consumers. With that goal in mind, the Senate should approve controversial legislation that would prevent states from requiring food makers to add misleading and superfluous data to labels.

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Congress preserved a role for state food labeling requirements in 1991.

The FDA compels more than health + safety info to help prevent consumer deception.

A recent study shows GMD labels will inform consumers - not act as a warning.

88% of consumers say they want GMD labeling, regardless of age, income or education level.

The legislation comes as a response to states like Vermont and Maine that have required food makers to disclose whether ingredients come from genetically modified food. "Genetically modified" is a slippery term — virtually all crops have been genetically modified by humans over the last 10,000 years — but has become a fashionable concern among some consumers.

Genetic engineering and traditional cross-breeding are very different.

Unlike calorie counts or allergen warnings, though, whether or not a food has come from a genetically modified source has no relationship to its health or safety. States that have mandated its inclusion next to legitimate health information are piggybacking on the credibility of food labels to imply that

GMD corn + soy have caused an explosion in the use of an herbicide linked to cancer.



genetically modified foods are also a health or nutrition factor — which study after study has shown is not the case.

Other critics of genetically modified foods admit they're safe to eat, but fall back on a political argument to justify the mandatory labeling laws. They say it's really about the economics, and that consumers want to know whether their food comes from the big corporations that develop and profit from genetically modified seeds. There are many reasons consumers want the right to know what's in their food, including religious, environmental + economic

But that's an even more pernicious reason to mandate labeling, one that would inappropriately redefine the purpose of food-labeling laws. Just because some consumers may have a political or superstitious interest in some bit of information about food has never meant that it would get the official sanction that comes with inclusion in labeling law. For instance, the government doesn't require produce companies to say whether their berries were picked by Democrats or Republicans, or whether they were packaged by a Capricorn. Yes, it's just information, and companies can provide it voluntarily if they wish, but requiring it would open a Pandora's box. The primary purpose of food labeling laws is to prevent consumer deception. 88% of consumers want the right to know what's in their food - including 84% of Republicans.

States that have tried to add content about genetically modified ingredients to food labels are undermining the credibility of the labeling system, which consumers will ignore if they lose trust that it's based on science. Indeed, the labeling legislation is the rare issue where the scientific community has aligned with Republicans, who've led the effort to preempt the state laws. The House has passed its version of the legislation to safeguard the integrity of food labeling laws, and the Senate should follow suit. Republicans have a great chance to disprove critics who've long accused them of anti-scientific bias, and they should take it. states have required many disclosures on food packages, including sell-by dates and grading requirements for dairy + citrus products.

The world's leading cancer scientists all agree that the primary herbicide used on GMD corn + soy is a "probable" human carcinogen.