Vote Yes on Measure 92 to Label Genetically Modified (GM) Foods

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GM crops are created through the insertion of DNA from another organism (plant or animal) into the plant’s nucleus. Most are designed to be herbicide-resistant; a smaller amount confer resistance to insect pests. GM crops are grown commercially over 420 million acres in 28 countries, including 172 million acres in the United States (half of total US cropland). GM crops are found in 85% of processed food, yet only 1 in 4 Americans thinks they have ever eaten GM foods.

Human Health, Environmental and Economic Consequences

GM crops have been associated with many adverse health effects in animal and human studies, including damage to multiple organs, tumors, changes in immune mediators, impaired fertility/miscarriages, allergies, and premature death. As evolution would predict, those engineered to resist herbicides have developed resistance, leading to increased herbicide use; while insecticide use initially decreased, many insects have now developed resistance to plants engineered for pest resistance, leading to increased insecticide use. Herbicides and insecticides are toxic to the blood, liver, kidney, brain, and reproductive systems. According to the EPA, each year in the US farm workers suffer 300,000 pesticide-related illnesses; the WHO estimates that 1 million people have died due to pesticides in the last 6 years. And, the NAS has stated that pesticides in food could cause up to 1 million cancers in the current generation of Americans.

GM crops damage the environment when genes initially designed to protect crops from herbicide are transferred to native weeds, creating “superweeds” resistant to multiple agents. Furthermore, almost 400 GM crop contamination events occurred between 1996 and 2013, many of them in countries where GM crops have never been planted, costing farmers billions of dollars through closing of foreign markets, and leading to multiple settlements and lawsuits.

GM seeds are produced by large agricultural biotech corporations, who make billions in profit and spend millions on lobbying and campaign donations to inhibit sensible rules and regulations. In the mid-1970s, none of the over 7,000 seed companies then operating controlled over 0.5% of the world seed market. Today, Monsanto (the largest), DuPont, and Syngenta control over 50%. These companies also make the herbicides that are sprayed on the crops, thus profiting from both seed and herbicide sales. Monsanto is the company that brought the world toxic compounds such as Agent Orange, PCBs, DDT, and dioxins. It has an extensive record of pollution, criminal activity, financial malfeasance, lawsuits against farmers whose fields have been contaminated with their (unwanted) GM seeds, bribery, human rights violations, and other ethical improprieties.

Despite claims that GM foods are the solution to world hunger, most are utilized for animal feed and biofuels production, and no GM crop has ever been marketed that is drought-resistant, flood-resistant, increases yield, or will solve nutritional deficiencies (which can already be solved relatively inexpensively through traditional agriculture, supplements, and political and social will). Instead, our government and agricultural biotech corporations have attempted to undermine the financial security of countries facing famine by offering only GM food aid, which could devastate their export
economies, which rely on the sale of non-GM crops to Europe and elsewhere. The UN’s Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has said that poverty is exacerbated by GM seeds.

**Vote Yes on Measure 92**

GM technology also includes biopharming, the genetic modification of plants and animals to produce pharmaceuticals and industrial chemicals, which carries even more grave potential health consequences should such plants escape their “contained” plots; and “terminator seeds,” which are sterile and produce only one generation of crops, thus transmogrifying farmers into bioserfs who, rather than save seeds to plant the following year, must purchase new seeds annually. The potential adverse consequences of this technology so threaten the world’s food supply that the world’s governments imposed a de facto moratorium on developing and testing under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Earlier this year, voters in Jackson and Josephine Counties passed bans on GM foods, as have other US localities. In November, Oregon voters will have the opportunity to vote on Measure 92, which would require the labeling of GM foods in the state. In 2002, opponents of a similar bill outspent proponents $5.5 million to $200,000, with most of the opposition’s money coming from agricultural corporations headquartered outside the state. Many polls conducted then and since show broad support for labeling in the US (85-90%). Sixty four countries throughout Europe and the world already require labeling, and many have banned GM foods.

Foods are already labeled in the US for vitamin, mineral, calorie, and fat content; sulfites (to warn those with allergies); sources of proteins (for vegetarians); kosher/hallal; not from concentrate; union made; and in some cases country of origin. When the European Union adopted labeling in the late 1990s, Monsanto ran an ad (in the United Kingdom, site of its headquarters, where the employee cafeteria is GM-free) that read: “Monsanto fully supports … these labels. We believe you should be aware of all the facts before making a purchase.” Indeed, Measure 92 is about the public’s right to know what goes into our food.

Opponents will no doubt, as they did in 2002, call labeling supporters anti-technology zealots, and spread misinformation about labeling being required for things like church bake sales and dog food. They will scare voters with unfounded claims of grocery price increases. However, when the EU passed labeling, food prices did not increase, and Consumers Union has predicted no increased prices if Measure 92 passes. Indeed, companies change their labeling all the time (think “new and improved”). Furthermore, Scott Faber, a former VP for Federal Affairs at the Grocery Manufacturer’s Association, a powerful opponent of Measure 92, said: “What I learned is that adding a few words to a label has no impact on the price of making or selling food.”

Oregon PSR and Health Care Without Harm, its partner on the Healthy Food in Health Care Program, support a YES vote on Measure 92.

**For more information:**

[Oregon Right to Know (Measure 92)]
[Public Health and Social Justice (Food Safety and Food Justice)]
Oregon PSR supports mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods (GMOs). We believe consumers have the right to know what is in their food and make informed decisions about what they eat.

While advocating for policy mandating GMO labeling, Oregon PSR also partners with Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) on the Healthy Food in Health Care Program to educate and mobilize the health care sector to support healthy and sustainable food systems. As large purchasers of food, hospitals and other health care institutions are driving sustainable markets by purchasing non-GM foods to the extent possible and sourcing from suppliers that demonstrate a commitment to providing non-GM products.