

What would Ceres say? The Grange and GMO labeling

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"When Ceres furnished them with corn she enjoined them to save a portion of the best for seed; and her admonition has been heeded."
(Manual of Subordinate Granges)

*From guardian of the ancient wild grasses
to our plump field grains, Ceres is our
Grange guide to the seed and sheaf of harvest.
If She could speak, Ceres might ask us:
what are we doing today with Her seeds?
-Annie Waters*

More than 80% of the corn, soy, canola and sugar beets grown in the United States are genetically engineered to withstand increasing applications of herbicides or to produce their own insecticide¹.

These seeds cannot be saved and planted again as were the traditionally-saved seeds of our ancestors.

Chemical and agriculture giants have strategically used intellectual property laws to commodify the worlds' seeds, maximizing profits by eliminating farmers' rights (ie, to save seeds), reducing choices, and raising prices unencumbered. The proprietary seed market now accounts for 82% of the commercial seed market worldwide².

If GMO crops continue to increase in prevalence, non-GMO agriculture may soon be impossible. The wind, insects, birds and agricultural practices can inadvertently cause cross-pollination between GMO crops, their organic counterparts and related plant species³.

Unlabeled seeds may inadvertently contaminate non-GMO seeds. This puts organic farms at risk of losing their organic status and conventional farmers at risk of losing sales to countries that don't allow imports of GMO foods.

Herbicide-resistant crop technology has led to a 527 million pound increase in herbicide use in the US between 1996 and

2011⁴. The widespread use of GMO crops and associated chemicals is linked to the emergence of "super weeds" and "super bugs" which can only be killed with ever more toxic poisons⁵.

The escalation of herbicide use comes at the expense of soil, pollinator, plant and human health and undermines efforts toward sustainable agriculture. These increases are, however, favored by the chemical manufacturers.

The U.S. government does not perform or require independent safety testing of new genetically engineered crops⁶, and there is a growing body of evidence linking the consumption of GMOs to such major conditions as auto immune diseases, digestive disorders, infertility and cancer⁷. Further independent research is needed, and labeling will allow public health officials to track public health impacts.

In order to protect the organic integrity of our seeds, our soil, our bodies and our biosphere, as well as the livelihoods of traditional farmers, we must institute adequate labeling and segregation of GMO seeds and products.

(GMO = genetically modified organism)

National polls consistently show that more than 90% of Americans want to know if their food is genetically engineered⁸. The people should be able to decide what model of agriculture we want to support, not the handful of chemical manufacturers and their friends in the federal government. In order to have a truly free market food economy, consumers need factual information that is important to them.

The chemical manufacturers and junk food companies who are benefiting from the current lack of transparency have spent \$27 MILLION in the first half of 2014 to influence ballot initiatives and spread misinformation to defeat grassroots GMO labeling

initiatives across the country⁹.

Fortunately, in recent months, even with an industry-friendly federal government in partisan gridlock, Connecticut, Maine and Vermont have all passed GMO labeling laws. Here in Massachusetts, a majority of state legislators have already endorsed the Massachusetts GMO labeling campaign¹⁰. Campaign organizers are seeking to build a critical mass of support for this commonsense legislation in 2015, and the Massachusetts State Grange now has an opportunity to join the fight and this critical moment.

"...the only remedy for the farmers was to organize themselves as a class in order to promote their common welfare."

-Solon Buck on the formation of the Grange (The Agrarian Crusade, 1921)

In addition to addressing the aforesaid problems, mandatory GMO labeling will have the following added benefits:

GMO labeling will increase demand for non-GMO products, creating additional markets and promoting economic development for Massachusetts farms, including those not certified organic and whose products are non-GMO.

Labeling of seeds will economically benefit local farmers by allowing them to grow, with security, non-GMO crops.

Labeling will promote small farms which increases the jobs market.

Mandatory GMO labeling is one important way to return to the people some power over the future course of our agricultural system

"Down with Monopoly!"
(1870's Grange slogan)

The GMO industry keeps saying that GMO labeling will increase food costs. However, dozens of other countries have instituted mandatory GMO labeling without significantly increasing food costs, and U.S.-based manufacturers already label their genetically engineered food products for sale in other countries¹¹.

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