



COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATS
ENERGY & COMMERCE
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., as prepared for delivery
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “A National Framework for the Review and Labeling of Biotechnology
in Food”**

Today, we will hear a range of views on why there should or should not be mandatory labeling of foods from genetically engineered or GE plants, and on why states should or should not be allowed to impose such labeling requirements. I am sure we will hear compelling arguments today on each side of the issue.

I have long been a proponent of strong food labeling requirements. I was an original cosponsor of the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990, was a strong advocate for the ACA provision requiring nutrition labeling on menus, and sponsored legislation last year, which I will be reintroducing, to update and strengthen current FDA nutrition labeling requirements. And I have strongly opposed any attempts to weaken existing labeling requirements, such as the Common Sense Nutrition Labeling bill, which I believe would impede consumer access to nutritional information on menus in restaurants, pizza parlors, grocery stores and convenience stores. So, I am inclined to be skeptical of legislation aimed at limiting rather than enhancing information on a food label.

At the same time, I recognize that the differences between nutrition labeling and GE labeling may warrant different regulatory approaches. Nutrition labeling provides information that enables consumers to make health-related choices in how they eat. There is no question in my mind that the federal government should require food companies to put that information on food labels.

GE labeling is about the breeding techniques used to make agricultural crops. Food from such crops do not share any particular nutritional or health-related properties. A GE label provides no information on the composition of the food, on whether it is good or bad for you, on whether it tastes good or bad, or on whether it is safe or unsafe. There is no scientific evidence that GE foods pose safety issues any different from non-GE foods. I have to admit, when I hear critics argue that GE foods are dangerous, I feel the same way I do when I hear people deny climate change, argue against vaccinating children, or say they aren't scientists when asked if they believe in evolution. So, from a science or health perspective, there doesn't seem to be a

compelling government interest in forcing a food company to label a food as made with or without genetic engineering.

That being said, if the state of Vermont wants to require food companies to put such information on their food labels, is there a compelling federal government interest in prohibiting them from doing so?

Perhaps not. But I do think there is a compelling federal interest in preventing any labeling that is false or misleading, consistent with current law. If mandatory GE labeling were inherently misleading, for example because it implied that GE food was somehow inferior to “normal” food, that would seem to be a compelling reason to prohibit it.

I am so far not convinced that the requirement imposed by Vermont would be inherently misleading. I will be interested in hearing from our panelists today on that question.

Now, there may be a compelling federal interest in preventing companies from having to face fifty different food labeling regimes. In fact, it was fear of such an unworkable set of state food labeling requirements that led food companies and restaurants ultimately to support federal requirements for nutrition labeling.

To avoid a 50 state problem, there are two obvious solutions. We can ban right to know labeling requirements outright, or we can replace them with a uniform federal mandatory GE labeling requirement. While I personally think a voluntary labeling approach is more appropriate for GE labeling, I also don't believe in preempting state law without good reason.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing on this important topic. There are a number of competing issues to weigh before moving forward on legislation and I hope we will take our time in considering them.

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