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April 19-21, 2016

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## Day In Washington

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### **Need for a National Standard for Labeling Products Produced with Genetic Engineering (GE)**

#### **Supermarket Industry Impact**

We agree on the importance of providing our customers with information that they desire about the products we sell and enabling them to make informed choices about products they want to buy. We urge Congress to support a preemptive uniform national GMO (genetically modified organisms) disclosure standard. A state-by-state patchwork of GMO labeling requirements would be confusing to consumers, inefficient (driving up food prices by \$1,000/year for low income families), and would undermine FDA and USDA oversight—as they are the architects of all food labeling requirements to date.

We need immediate action. Vermont passed the first state law requiring labeling of GE ingredients in 2014, and the law takes effect on July 1st. Companies will have to begin executing compliance measures immediately. Fines for non-compliance are \$1,000 per product, per day. In-store labeling requirements are likely to shut down supermarket bakeries and delis, with compliance costs far exceeding profitability. We anticipate significant supply chain disruption – trucks that can only go to Vermont reduce efficiencies (more trucks, more gas, inefficient routes, and larger warehouses).

#### **Position**

We strongly support the *Biotechnology Labeling Solutions Act*, legislation that passed out of the Senate Agriculture Committee on March 1st by a bipartisan vote of 14-6. The legislation would create a uniform national standard for the labeling of products containing GMOs that preempts differing state laws. While the Senate was unable to invoke cloture on the bill when it was brought to the Senate floor on March 16, we urge lawmakers to resolve their differences and approve a national standard for GMO labeling.

In July 2015, the House passed similar legislation, the *Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act* (H.R. 1599). U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has also weighed in, supporting a national system of information disclosure and has worked toward its implementation.

#### **Background**

With the House's passage of the *Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act* (H.R. 1599), the next move in the efforts to enact a preemptive uniform federal standard governing GMO labeling resides in the Senate. Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) has led efforts to try to move legislation in the U.S. Senate that is in-line with the concerns of our members. If Congress is able to move forward similar GMO labeling legislation, it will give them a brief window to enact its provisions before companies have to begin executing plans to comply with

the Vermont GMO labeling law and its July 1st effective date. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's (R-KY) willingness to bring the GMO labeling bill back to the Senate floor for final passage will be dependent on our ability to generate strong and sufficient support among both Senate Democrats and Republicans.

#### Meaningful GMO Disclosure Requires Flexibility

- In order to best communicate clear, consistent information on GMOs, retailers and manufacturers need the flexibility to provide that disclosure in a manner that best suits the needs of their individual companies and customers.
- Sometimes this goal may be best accomplished with on-pack labeling, but when you know suppliers will change or your customers need a more detailed explanation of the technology, electronic disclosure via a web site, interactive packaging or a QR code with a 1-800 number may be most effective.