GMO Labeling Causes Consumers To Trust Bioengineered Foods

For a month before President Obama signed the first federal GMO labeling law in 2016 Vermont's own labeling law took effect. The labels implemented in Vermont were clear and concise and informed customers of products "produced with genetic engineering" or "partially produced using genetic engineering." Two years after that program, researchers at the University of Vermont found that those labels made consumers more likely to trust GMOs. Researchers examined more than 7,800 surveys of Vermonters and their attitudes towards GMOs and saw opposition to genetically modified foods dropped 19% after the labeling law took effect. The research doesn't provide sales numbers, but people reported they were more likely to trust in GMOs. What does this mean, and will we see that same shift in attitudes when the federal labeling law is finalized at the end of July?

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Just Gimme A Reason

Why do labels make consumers more likely to feel positively towards GMOs? There isn't a definitive answer to that question, but the study of from the University of Vermont points to the control that labeling gives consumers.

A choice is important in the modern world, and the staunch opposition to GMO labeling by biotech companies has served to make many people suspicious of their intentions and frustrated with the lack of transparency. The Vermont labeling did nothing to indicate that GMOs are safer, yet allowing people a choice improved attitudes towards GMOs by nearly 20 percent. For today's consumer, the ability to opt out of a

service is crucial.

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Label Confusion

How will that dynamic play out with the federal labeling law legally required to be finalized by July 29?

To begin with, there are differences in the way labeling will be implemented. Labels in Vermont were simple and concise. In contrast, national labels will be a single sentence, a standardized icon, or a QR code. The labels are likely to look something like this:

Companies are also able to label their products as "bioengineered" as opposed to genetically modified or GMO, an option that could confuse consumers. Plans are not finalized yet, but there is also the possibility that highly refined sugars and oils made from genetically modified corn, soybeans, and sugar beets, will not require the GMO label. What began as a clear indication of food with genetically modified ingredients in a single state has evolved into a tentative nationwide plan that significantly muddies the waters of the GMO issue.

> *Loopholes proposed by the Trump administration could exempt more than 10,000 – or one out of six – genetically modified foods from a new GMO disclosure law." – New analysis by EWG.*

Related: *How to Avoid GMOs in 2018 – And Everything Else You Should Know About Genetic Engineering*

So Bored

Confusing labels likely won't matter much. The world seems to have moved on from the debate over the problems caused by GMOs. Allowing people the choice to opt out of these products has the potential to calm public anxiety more than years campaigning and safety studies from Monsanto ever could. In fact, GMOs are in the best position, politically, they've been in years due to the positive press from the step forward in labeling, the disappearance of the Monsanto name, and a public focused on more immediate political issues.

Is this the point where the public expresses approval for GMOs? Or do we say nothing and achieve the same thing?

Sources:

- *Consumers Fear GMOs Less When They're Labeled, Vermont Study Finds* – WBUR
- *Mandatory GMO labels are coming to your food* – Washington Post
- *Mandatory labels can improve attitudes toward genetically engineered food* – Science Advances
- *USDA on GMO labeling law: 'Still on track, but a little behind'* – Food Dive