



*Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine 04333-0002*

March 15, 2016

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Collins and Senator King,

As members of the Maine State Legislature, we the undersigned respectfully request that you vote against Senator Pat Roberts' R-KS bill to preempt state GMO labeling laws, S 2609. This bill circumvents state laws while keeping consumers in the dark about what is in their food.

GMO labeling is exceptionally popular in Maine, and has broad bipartisan political support. LD718 passed the Maine legislature with overwhelming support; 35-0 in the State Senate, and 141-4 in the State House in 2013. Polling shows that 97 percent of Mainers support mandatory, on-package labeling of genetically engineered food ingredients. When the House version of this bill came to a vote last fall, both Rep. Chellie Pingree and Rep. Bruce Poliquin voted against it. Few issues draw such overwhelming and universal consensus, and we should stand united as a state.

State labeling laws pose little danger of creating the "messy patchwork" and the price shocks that some labeling opponents fear. The labeling laws in Maine, Vermont and Connecticut are designed to be clear, simple and uniform. When enacted, all labeled products would contain the words "Produced with Genetic Engineering".

There are many examples of state-specific labeling laws that do not create the broad based market chaos and price shocks that industry lobbyists currently predict. Minnesota enacted a state law to differentiate between "cultivated white rice" and "natural lake or river wild rice." Vermont has state-specific laws in place for maple syrup. Alaska currently has a labeling law for genetically engineered salmon on the books, and states have a wide array of laws and requirements for can and bottle recycling. Food labeling changes are common and cheap, and have virtually no effect on food prices.

Campbell's Soup is currently in the process of labeling its genetically engineered products. They will do so without raising prices. Consumers Union, the policy arm of Consumer Reports, commissioned a study that found that the median cost of mandatory labeling would be less than a penny per person a day.

We would welcome a federal, mandatory labeling law that meets the standards of our states, but would otherwise prefer that our decisions on this matter remain law.

We support the consumer's right to know what is in their food, and believe that Senator Roberts' bill will undermine that right.

Mandatory labeling empowers consumers to choose between one product and another, and the bill reflects a lack of faith in the ability of ordinary people to make decisions for themselves. Voluntary labeling empowers companies to control how, what, and when their customers are given information. This bill sends a message to our constituents that we don't think they're smart enough to make informed decisions about what they eat and feed their families. We can do better.

I urge you to oppose any bill that takes the labeling issue out of the hands of Maine's people and legislature, and puts it into the hands of unelected business interests from out of state.

Sincerely,

Speaker of the House Mark Eves (D-North Berwick)
Asst. House Majority Leader Sara Gideon (D-Freeport)
Senate Minority Leader Justin Alford (D-Cumberland)

Sen. Geoffrey Gratwick (D-Penobscot)
Sen. Anne Haskell (D-Cumberland)
Sen. Christopher Johnson (D-Lincoln)
Sen. Rebecca Millett (D-Cumberland)
Sen. David Miramant (D-Knox)
Sen. John Patrick (D-Oxford)
Sen. David Woodsome (R-York)

Rep. Henry Bear - Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
Rep. Benjamin Chipman (D-Portland)
Rep. Donna Doore (D-Augusta)
Rep. Larry Dunphy (U-Embden)
Rep. Michelle Dunphy (D-Old Town)
Rep. Paul Gilbert (D-Jay)

Rep. Adam Goode (D-Bangor)
Rep. Stacey Guerin (R-Glenburn)
Rep. Craig Hickman (D-Winthrop)
Rep. Barry Hobbins (D-Saco)
Rep. Jonathan Kinney (R-Limington)
Rep. Chuck Kruger (D-Thomaston)
Rep. Walter Kumiega (D-Deer Isle)
Rep. Michel Lajoie (D-Lewiston)
Rep. Thomas Longstaff (D-Waterville)
Rep. Matthew Pouliot (R-Augusta)
Rep. Deane Rykerson (D-Kittery)
Rep. Nathan Wadsworth (R-Hiram)
Rep. Charlotte Warren (D-Hallowell)
Rep. Joan Welsh (D-Rockport)

Cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry