

9011-4282

586 Parker Street
Newark, NJ 07104
August 6, 2000

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FDA Commissioner Jane Henney
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061 (HFA-305)
Rockville, MD 20852

Re: Docket No. 00P-1211/CP1

Dear Commissioner Henney,

A few days ago, I received a solicitation from Greenpeace, urging me to support its petition in favor of labelling genetically modified foods. The solicitation frightened me, and I write in opposition to Greenpeace's position.

The frightening part was in the second paragraph, which I quote:

We have an absolute right to know what is in the food that we are purchasing, as well as how it was produced. Scientists and doctors have warned that these crops may have unexpected side-effects in the diet and the environment, and there is no evidence that these foods are safe in the long-run.

We do have an "absolute right" to know how food was produced? I doubt it. Say that a homophobic organization argues that gay food workers might introduce AIDS in packaged food. This assertion is completely out of mainstream science, but doubtless some homophobic physicians would attest to this "risk." By Greenpeace's logic, then, homophobes have an "absolute right" to enlist the FDA to target food companies that hire gay workers.

This is a democratic open society. Because this is an open society, Greenpeace certainly has a right to advocate Luddism. However, because this is a democratic society, the FDA is precluded from heeding Greenpeace's advocacy. The FDA is an administrative agency, receiving its mandate from Congress. It is Congress' job to heed popular pressure (including Greenpeace's) and issue mandates to agencies like the FDA. It is the FDA's job to follow Congressional mandates, and ignore popular pressure that conflicts with the mandates. The current Congressional mandate sets a threshold for FDA action: credible scientific evidence. Greenpeace, as far as I can tell, has scare tactics, but no evidence. If this is so, Greenpeace is simply lobbying the wrong part of our democratic government.

If the FDA bows to Greenpeace, your agency will have legitimated similar strategies by the homophobes, the racists, the religious fanatics, and anybody else who can leverage an unverified claim of food safety onto their cause. Please preserve democracy here, so we will not have to fight for it elsewhere.

Sincerely,



Joseph H. Sommer

00P-1211

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