

December 5, 1999

Dear Commissioner Henney,

The letter below is part of correspondence sent to various politicians regarding the subject of genetically engineered foods. Although some information may be irrelevant to your agency in particular, the letter shows my opposition to GE foods.

In short, I find the FDA's refusal to label GE foods, much less prevent their manufacture, frightening. And I am literally offended to learn that it is illegal for a conscientious food manufacturer to label their product as "non-GE". I consider this behavior on the part of the FDA to be no less than indoctrination aimed at supporting food corporations at the expense of the consumer's health.

I spent time in England this summer, where the government is not trying to force feed its citizens. In one large grocery store chain in London, they even have the consideration to provide to customers a list of all products that may contain GE ingredients until they are certain their shelves are free of GE foods.

I do not appreciate the fact that my very CHOICE of whether or not to eat GE foods has been usurped. For your information, since returning from Europe in August, I have not bought a single food product at a conventional grocery store. I have also drastically reduced the amount of meals I eat outside my home. So if you are hoping that intentionally concealing whether or not a food product contains GE ingredients is going to help the food manufacturers, perhaps you had better reconsider.

In the letter below, you will see that food allergies and sensitivities are a major health problem for me. Furthermore, there is only one strain of antibiotics that I am not allergic to, and in the past two years these antibiotics have been less and less effective in treating recurrent sinus infections. If I am forced to eat food the source of which I can not trace, it seems that your agency could be held responsible for my worsening health condition. Do you want that responsibility?

From a letter sent in October 1999:

I suffer from severe food and drug allergies and sensitivities, some of which are life-threatening. I have reacted to everything from Centrum Vitamins and Red Dye #40, to mushrooms and citrus fruits. My diet choices are extremely restricted, and I rely on honest and accurate food and drug labeling to ensure that I will not put my health, albeit, my very life, in danger.

Last year, I began buying all meats and seafood at a natural foods grocery store. I did not want to buy meat or seafood that could contain antibiotics, synthetic hormones, or other contaminants. I would make other trips to a conventional grocery store to buy produce and paper goods.

Early this summer, I became aware that government agencies such as the FDA, USDA, and the EPA were refusing to require food companies to label products containing genetically engineered organisms. As I did more research on biotech foods, my concern over them grew. I became especially wary of the possibility of allergic reactions from foods I once considered safe for me, with my allergy history, that could now contain genetic components of a food that could be harmful to me. Consequently, I began purchasing all fruits and vegetables at the natural foods store, as well, where I could be sure I was getting produce that had not been genetically altered.

In short, I will not return to buying perishable food products at a conventional grocery store until the appropriate government agencies mandate the labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods.

92N-0139

C 6420

Up until a couple of months ago, I was still buying paper goods and non-perishables at a conventional grocery store, where the prices were usually lower. However, making several trips to different stores has become burdensome, and I have since been buying ALL my grocery items at the natural foods grocery store. (There are now two large natural foods grocery stores in my neighborhood.)

Because convenience has led me to now purchase my non-perishable items at the natural foods store, as well, numerous companies have lost my business. Among the brand-name products I used to purchase regularly at a conventional grocery store included Hefty, Heinz, Uncle Ben's, Aunt Jemima, and Kraft. The government agencies think they are protecting American corporations by hiding the fact that certain foods contain genetically engineered products. This may be true for corporations such as Monsanto and Novartis. After all, as long as the FDA continues to hide the fact that produce from these companies is genetically altered, many consumers will essentially be forced to buy GE foods. But, as I have described, such deception will ultimately harm not only Monsanto, but other companies, too--companies not even involved in the biotech controversy. Because of the lack of labeling for GE foods, people like myself will not shop at conventional grocery stores. Now not only have corporations such as Monsanto and Novartis lost our business, but so have everyday brands such as the ones I mentioned above. I was perfectly happy buying Heinz catsup and Hefty garbage bags--but I will not make a trip to a different grocery store in order to keep buying these brands.

Essentially, the FDA, USDA, and EPA, have driven my business away from any conventional grocery store until GE foods are labeled. Living in the Chicago area, I used to be a regular customer at Dominick's grocery store. I was very happy with Dominick's customer service and their choice of goods. In fact, I miss shopping at Dominick's. But until GE foods are labeled completely and honestly, I will not purchase food products from any conventional grocery store. Furthermore, as long as government agencies fail to require labeling of GE foods, restaurants, as well as grocers, may suffer. As I become more aware of the potential dangers surrounding GE foods, I have greatly decreased the number of meals I eat out--especially at fast food restaurants, and even at sit-down restaurants. If I have to shop at organic food stores and cook the majority of my meals at home in order to ensure I have safe food to eat, that is what I will do.

And please do not even think about trying to convince me about the safety of GE foods. The FDA approved dangerous products such as Fen-Phen and Seldane that many Americans trusted in, until they became dangerously ill from them--why should anyone trust their opinion on something as important as the food we eat everyday? The Seldane disaster affected me personally. With my history of allergies, I have been a regular consumer of antibiotics and antihistamines for years. Before the FDA even came out with warnings against Seldane, I experienced heart murmurs while taking the drug with certain antibiotics. *I could have died* because of information the FDA did not disclose, or because of insufficient testing that the FDA oversaw. What is going to happen in six months or a year or in six years when the pesticides programmed into our potatoes are found to cause cancer or brain damage? And, of course, there are the potential allergic reactions to worry about. I am allergic to corn. Who is going to pay my medical bills if I eat a potato or other vegetable that has been genetically modified to include the genetic identity of corn and causes an allergic reaction? Are you aware that allergic reactions to food usually grow in intensity with each episode, often building up to anaphylactic shock, even death, from subsequent reactions? Is the FDA going to say, "Whoops!" again, and recall the food in question? The poor judgment the FDA exercises are not simple arithmetic errors that can be erased with the other end of a pencil--they are committing errors with the health and lives of human beings.

I realize that the government agencies are under pressure from food and drug companies who are anxious to make profits from their products. But what has the bottom line become? Profit? There can only be one bottom line when it comes to public health. Which is it going to be, Senator,

money or human life? If it is going to money, God help us all.

Furthermore, we are far behind Europe and Canada in our government agencies' willingness to protect our health. America seems to be going at great lengths to differ from European policies concerning GE foods, many European countries having proceeded more cautiously and sensibly from the advent of the availability of GE foods. Are our government officials still so insecure in regards to the independence of our country that they have to differ from European policies *just* to be different? even if maintaining independence endangers the lives of American citizens? The War of Independence has long since ended; we have nothing to prove in that area. If we happen to agree with European policy concerning GE foods, that would not be a weakness. And how dare U.S. companies put punitive tariffs or trade restrictions on goods coming from countries refusing to purchase our poisoned food--that is nothing short of blackmail!

To return to the labeling issue, it makes absolutely no sense that foods have to be labeled for sugar, chemicals, artificial colors, and other additives that could be dangerous to the health of consumers, and yet the government agencies delay the labeling GE foods. There is no other reason for this delay than to protect the food corporations. Please stop this X-File-style cover up--which isn't even covered up since consumers know so much already--and work to pass legislation to label all genetically engineered foods.

On a final note, I would like to add respectfully, but honestly, the following. I find it a bit insulting and irritating, if not frightening, that I have had to take as much time as I have researching biotech foods and writing this letter. I have a full-time job (I teach high school), and I have spent many hours in the past six months familiarizing myself with the literature on genetically engineered food products. I have even taken money from an already tight personal budget to join organizations working against GE foods. Why should I, a private citizen, have to convince my government leaders not to poison our food supply? What is Washington doing for the American citizen? It is utterly absurd that thousands of people are spending their time and money working to convince politicians to pass legislation to label GE foods, when the government agencies in question have known all along what the right thing to do would be. These posturing games are fine in the wrestling arena on a Saturday morning television show for children, but they are inexcusable when dealing with human lives. One function of a nation's government is to protect its citizens, to put parameters on human impulses such as greed and ambition so that the majority of the people have a *fair* chance at living healthy and productive lives. How can a government that is supposedly *for* the people approve the sale of potentially harmful food--and not even have the decency to tell them which foods may be dangerous so that we at least have the option of buying alternative foods?

The problem with making decisions behind people's backs--which is what the FDA, USDA, and the EPA have done with biotech foods--is that once an issue becomes public, the decisions that were made clandestinely have been put into motion without allowing any contest from the very people those decisions affect. If the public had been told from the beginning that genetically engineered foods were going to be appearing on their grocers' shelves, there could have been a dialogue concerning the lack of labeling before it mushroomed into the problem it has become. The companies and the government agencies knew this. Why else would they have acted covertly? How can America be governed "of the people" and "by the people" if vital information is deceptively withheld *from* the people? withheld, even, by the very agencies who are supposed to be acting in our best interest? And where is the concept of free enterprise when it comes to food products? If an automobile company produced a car no one bought, the company would go out of business. But the consumer would have had a choice not to buy the car. With GE foods, our very ability to choose is being taken away when we are not told which food contains GE products.

I am terribly disappointed in the behavior of the FDA, USDA, and the EPA in regards to the issue

of genetic engineering. I can only hope that you, as a decision-maker acting in the best interest of the American citizen, will fight for what is ethically sound and insist that genetically engineered products be subject to stringent labeling laws.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L.F. Ryan', written in a cursive style.

Lisa F. Ryan
16W518 Honeysuckle Rose #111
Hinsdale, IL 60521



Lisa F. Ryan
 16 W 518 Honeysuckle Rose
 #111
 Hinsdale, IL 60521

16.70



COMMISSIONER JANE HENNEY
 DOCKET No. 99N-4282
 FDA DOCKETS MANAGEMENT BRANCA (HFA-305)
 5630 FISHERS LANE, Room 1061
 ROCKVILLE, MD 20852

20857/0001

