

LINDA M.  WHITTIG

FDA Commissioner Jane Henney  
Dockets Management Branch (HFA 305)  
Food and Drug Administration  
5630 Fisher's Lane, Room 1061  
Rockville, MD 20852

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January 21, 2001

Dear Commissioner Henney:

I'm having a clear sense of *deja vu*. When the USDA submitted their first draft of the National Organic Standards they got thousands and thousands of letters from the public telling them that they had missed the mark on what the public expected the term "organic" to mean. I find the FDA's proposed guidelines on genetically engineered (GE) foods equally insensitive to what the people are actually requesting.

I thought the very purpose of the Food and Drug Administration is to make sure that the products on the shelves are safe for consumption. How can you guarantee that GE foods meet this criteria when safety testing and mandatory labeling are still not required? This means that literally thousands of products will make it to store shelves without any testing on what the results of GE foods may have on human health.

There are many advantages to labeling, a few of which are:

- Protects people with food allergies

The FDA states that if a genetically engineered (GE) food contains known allergens, it must be labeled. What about the allergens that are unknown in these experimental foods? Often genetic engineering splices in proteins that have never been eaten by humans. This at a time, when according to your agency, at least 8% of children have food allergies, 16% of all men and 13% of all women can look forward to getting a food-related case of cancer, and there are 76 million cases of food poisoning a year.

- Long term effects

Plants are being altered in order to make them resistant to specific pesticides so that farmers can spray heavier doses of these chemicals on their land. This results in eating a much higher concentration of chemicals than were present prior to this technology. What is the long-term effect on humans, as well as the environment, due to the increased application of pesticides and herbicides? The lack of labeling makes it all the harder for scientists to find this answer and to hold the responsible parties accountable.

- Moral and religious issues

Genetical engineering raises concerns for people with religious or dietary beliefs who could unknowingly find themselves eating food that contains animal genes.

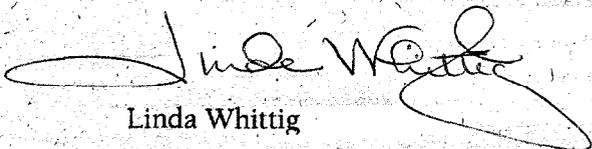
With so many health, environmental and ethical considerations surrounding GE foods, it seems only logical to support mandatory labeling as a means of helping consumers make the choices that concern their lives.

Labeling is now required in Europe, Japan and Australia. Shouldn't the same consideration be shown to Americans? Why in a country that prides itself on having many choices, are consumers being deprived of the information needed to make informed ones on the food they eat? It's what the public wants. According to a January 11, 1999 *Time* magazine poll, 80% of Americans said they want mandatory labeling.

I think that the excitement generated by the power of discovery has clouded the vision of the bigger picture and what the long-term effects of biotechnology may be. I want to choose whether I am a test subject in this nationwide experiment. It is not enough to make labeling voluntary - it must be mandatory.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Linda Whittig

cc: President George Bush

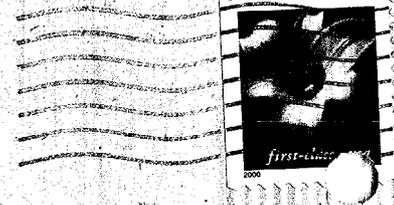
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