

**WASHINGTON STATE INITIATIVE 522 -  
LABELING OF GENETICALLY-ENGINEERED FOODS**

**Ballot Title:**

This measure would require most raw agricultural commodities, processed foods, and seeds and seed stocks, if produced using genetic engineering, as defined, to be labeled as genetically engineered when offered for retail sale.

Should this measure be enacted into law?

Yes             No

**What this measure will do:**

If I-522 is approved, genetically engineered raw agricultural products and processed foods will have to be labeled beginning July 1, 2015.

There are exemptions that include:

- Food sold in restaurants
- Alcoholic beverages
- Certified organic food (which by law cannot contain any deliberately added genetically engineered ingredients)
- Meat from animals that ate genetically engineered feed
- Food produced with processing aids or enzymes, if those are its only genetically engineered ingredients.

Until July 1, 2019, there is an exemption for processed food where the ingredients are 0.9% or less of the total weight.

Genetically engineered seeds sold at retail would be labeled.

Retailers, farmers, and anyone else in the food business could be protected from liability if they have statements from either suppliers or independent testing saying ingredients are not genetically engineered.

The Department of Health (DOH) has enforcement authority to impose civil penalties of up to \$1,000 per day. DOH has limited rulemaking authority in that it cannot create any exemptions beyond those stated in the act. Enforcement may also occur through private enforcement actions in the public interest.

**How much will this measure cost?**

Costs to Washington State include the initial expense of developing a program to regulate labeling of genetically modified food offered for retail sale, as well as subsequent implementation and enforcement costs. The exact costs cannot be forecast accurately at this point. The Washington state consumer may expect to see an increase in food costs as manufacturers, distributors and retailers implement the mandatory verifications and documentation required for all foods deemed genetically modified.



**Quick facts about GMOs and Labeling:**

Mandatory labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods in the United States has been proposed, but not enacted, at the national, state, and local levels. Bills requiring mandatory labeling have been introduced in Congress and in the Colorado legislature, and there have also been attempts to place citizens' initiatives on statewide and local Colorado ballots. Maine and Connecticut have passed laws requiring labeling, however, their laws' enactment are dependent upon more states participating. Japan and the European Union, nations to whom the US exports substantial amounts of food products, currently require genetically engineered foods to be labelled.

Those in favor of labeling emphasize consumers' right to know what's in their food. Opponents of labeling point out the expense and logistical difficulties of labeling, and the fact that no significant differences have been found between GE and conventional foods.

Implementation of mandatory labeling will require resolution of several complex technical issues.

Whether or not to require labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods is a key issue in the ongoing debate over the risks and benefits of food crops produced using biotechnology.

**Background: Genetic Engineering**

What does genetic engineering mean? It is targeted manipulation of a plant's DNA to modify specific traits. It can involve adding genes from the same species or another species. In the past 10,000 years, genetic modification was achieved through selective breeding for specific traits. Today, this modification can occur very rapidly in the laboratory.

Many genetically engineered crops were designed to resist either herbicides, insect pests or both. Others have been developed to add nutrients to combat malnutrition or famine. Some seeds have been designed to counteract environmental effects such as drought, wind and weather. Others have been engineered simply to make them more commercially attractive. There are many, many different kinds and outcomes of genetic engineering and one description does not apply to all.

Although in numerous studies, there have not been any proven health risks shown to humans consuming GMO foods, there are indications that there may be substantial risks to the environment from unintended consequences of introducing GMOs into the ecosystem, or from increased herbicide use caused by herbicide-resistant species.

The most common GE crops in the United States are soybean, corn, cotton, and canola. Because many processed food products contain soybean or corn ingredients (e.g., high fructose corn syrup or soy protein), it's estimated that 60 to 70 percent of processed foods in grocery stores include at least one GE ingredient.



**Those in favor of “APPROVE” on I-522 say:**

It is fundamental to our democracy that consumers have a right to information so that they can make informed choices.

This bill will facilitate our sharing in the global economy, as Japan and many European nations require labeling of Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods. If GMOs penetrate the conventional market, wheat, for example, will not be saleable overseas. Washington has a \$15 billion export market.

GMO-based foods have allergenic risks and scientific uncertainty in their molecular characterization, both of which would make it very difficult even to identify an unexpected health effect without GMO labeling. There are cancer concerns and people should be able to choose to avoid any potential carcinogen. There are major human health risks that companies have not disclosed in the past.

There is a conflict of interest in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA does not undertake independent testing, but rather the industry voluntarily and confidentially tests the safety of its own products.

Organic labeling is no substitute for GMO-free. The organic industry is threatened with GMO contamination. GMO crops ultimately increase the use of pesticides.

The first amendment protects the free flow of information. The weight of legal authority, including the commerce clause and the supremacy clause, is on the side of requiring labeling.

**Those in favor of “REJECT” on I-522 say:**

Consumer curiosity is not the same as a substantial governmental interest. Any regulation should be, if at all, on the federal level; otherwise we have a patchwork quilt of regulations which makes compliance very difficult and drives up food costs, which disproportionately affects the poor. Requiring a completely separate food-delivery system for GMO products in one state alone would be very expensive.

Changes made to food using genetic engineering are not substantially different from changes that occur when plants and animals are selectively bred by conventional means. The process simply requires less time. The National Academy of Sciences has found no evidence of ill health effects and millions of people have eaten genetically modified foods for 20 years.

Labeling does not help Washington consumers make informed decisions about their health, the safety of their food, or its nutritional value. Indeed, by requiring a singular broad label, labeling may create the false assumption that all genetically engineered crops have the same risks and provide the same benefits.

Consumers have the choice to buy certified organic foods already. There is a necessity to feed the world's population and GMO food can help do this.

The weight of legal authority – in particular, the first amendment and the commerce clause – is on the side of not labeling GMO foods. GMO legislation would likely be rendered unenforceable by the courts.

