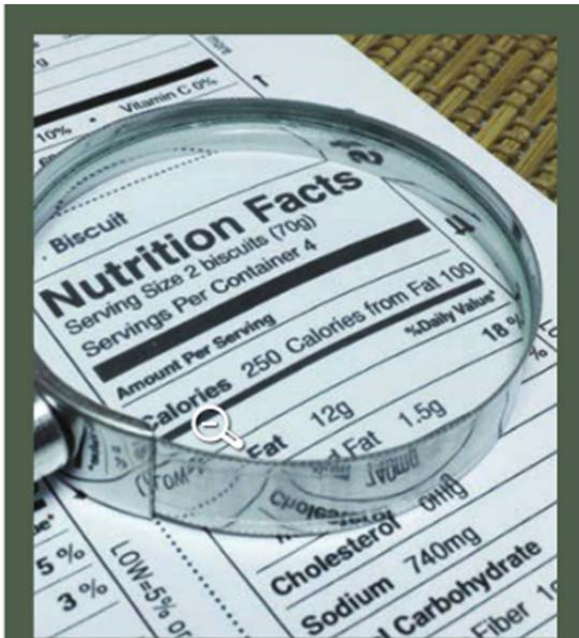


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Food manufacturers applaud food labeling act

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill last month banning states from requiring specific labels for foods containing genetically modified organisms. Three states (Vermont, Connecticut and Maine) had already passed such laws and a dozen more were considering them, said Lou Biscotti, partner in charge of the global food and beverage practice at WeiserMazars, an accounting firm with offices in Woodbury.

Food manufacturers watched closely as the House voted to establish a federal standard for voluntary GMO labeling. The bill then went to the Senate.

“It would be complete chaos if each state had its own GMO labeling regulations,” said Biscotti, noting manufacturers that ship to different states would incur extra costs.

In GMOs, the DNA of plants or parts of plants is modified using genetic engineering techniques.

The push for GMOs developed amid concerns over feeding the world’s growing population.

“The thinking is that we have to do something to increase food production,” Biscotti said, noting the use of GMOs has resulted in greater production yields.

Known as the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015, the bill contains some consumer protections. Developers of a GMO intended as food must submit a premarket biotechnology notification to the Food and Drug Administration. A food label can only claim that a food is non-GMO if the ingredients are subject to certain supply chain process controls, and if there is a material difference between a GMO food and a comparable non-GMO food, the FDA can specify labeling that informs consumers of the difference.

But because the bill does not require GMO labels in most cases, detractors have labeled it the Denying Americans the Right to Know Act, or DARK Act.

“It didn’t go as far as the activists would have liked,” Biscotti said.

Rep. Mike Pompeo (R, Kansas), who authored the bill, said mandatory labeling laws would be unnecessarily costly due to the fact that the FDA has deemed GMOs safe.

However, 57 percent of adults believe GMOs are unsafe to eat, according to the Pew Research Center.

– **BERNADETTE STARZEE**

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