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7/20/2015

United States House of Representatives

Dear Representative:

I write on behalf of Ben & Jerry's to urge you to oppose H.R. 1599, the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015, otherwise known as the DARK Act.

As you know, national public opinion polling shows that more than 90% of Americans want to know whether the products they purchase contain genetically engineered ingredients (GMOs). Just like labels that require disclosure of farm-raised salmon or orange juice from concentrate, mandatory labeling of GMO food will provide consumers the information they need to make choices for themselves and their families. Only mandatory GMO labeling will ensure that American consumers have the same right to know what's in the food as citizens in 64 other countries around the world, including many where Ben & Jerry's operates. H.R. 1599, with its voluntary framework for labeling products without GMOs, will only enhance confusion in the marketplace.

As a Vermont-based company, we are particularly troubled that H.R. 1599 would preempt Vermont's Act 120, which beginning in July of 2016, will require labeling of food products with GMO ingredients sold in Vermont. As a food company doing business in all 50 states, we'd prefer a national standard for mandatory GMO labeling, but absent that, we support states like Vermont passing legislation that ensures transparency and consumers' right to know.

As an ice cream company that operates in more than 30 countries, many of which require mandatory GMO labeling, we are not swayed by arguments that mandatory labeling will be expensive. The truth is, we regularly make changes, sometimes big, sometimes small to our packaging. Every year, we make changes to between 25% and 50% of our packaging. Over the last 7 years, we've gone through three full line redesigns. In other words, we have changed the packaging on every single pint in our product line as a matter of normal business. I can tell you unequivocally that changing labels does not require us raise the price of our products. Lots of things impact the cost a consumer pays for a pint of Ben & Jerry's. Label changes are not one.

I'd be more than happy to discuss this issue and how it would impact a large international food company like ours in more detail with you or your staff. I urge you to stand with the more than 90% of Americans that support transparency in our food system by opposing H.R. 1599.

All the best,

Jostein Solheim  
CEO, Ben & Jerry's