

A campaign for the labeling of genetically modified foods: What should a food labeling system really count on?

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After an over-years campaign, on November 7, 2012, the Proposition 37, a California state-wide initiative, which would have mandatorily required food retailers and producers to label food products if they were genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or containing genetically modified (GM) ingredients, had been defeated by California voters by a margin of 53 to 47 percent. The Prop 37 has ignited the debate again within the North America about the risks and benefits of GM foods, transparency of food supply systems, and the protection of consumers' right to know and their informed choice. This research will review the rationales proclaimed by the Proposition 37 and will make normative analysis on whether consumer's right to know alone can justify a mandatory labeling requirement to GM foods and foods containing GM ingredients. Based on a scientific and economic exploration and recent legal practice of GMOs labeling in the North America, EU and China, I will argue that a demanding on mandatory labeling of GMOs should be primarily based on health risk concerns and scientific risk assessments. The public has a legitimate right to ask for information about GM foods sold in market, e.g., what a GMO is and whether it is safe for consumption, but the argument of consumers' right to know cannot solely justify the mandatory labeling requirement. It is suggested that the government has to use a labeling system that can both secure the full information disclosure and a well protection of GM food producers and distributors.

Biography

Li Du is a Ph.D. candidate in Health Law and Science Policy Group (HeaLS), Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. His current research interest is in the biotechnology law and policy, and focuses specifically on labeling regulations of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). By researching on scientific study of GMOs safety concerns, exploring relevant factors of different labeling schemes, and examining the role of scientific evidence in law and policy-making, he intends to provide a deeper understanding of the legal, ethical and social issues associated with conflicts of GMOs labeling regimes. Li's research has also touched on legal and ethical issues regarding stem cell tourism. He is a Canadian Institutes for Health Research Health Law and Policy Program fellow and is sitting as a Trainee Communications Committee of Canadian Stem Cell Network.

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