



Council for Responsible Genetics Statement

RE: AAAS Board Statement Against Labeling of Genetically Engineered Foods

The Council for Responsible Genetics is in fundamental disagreement with the recent statement from the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in which it offered assurances that genetically modified foods (GMOS) are safe and that therefore labeling of foods containing GM ingredients is unnecessary. The AAAS leadership did not reach this decision, a response to Proposition 37 in California, by a vote of its membership.

We are deeply concerned that a scientific body such as the AAAS would take such an action without giving a complete review of the science behind its statement.

As scientists, they should know that citing a few studies in favor of their position can no longer be considered a compelling argument. Indeed, the AAAS Board did not conduct a thorough analysis of the literature, nor did they include studies that could cast doubt upon their conclusions.

The truth is we do not know conclusively what the long-term effects of growing and consuming GM crops will be. There have been very few systematic and independent animal studies testing the safety of GM crops. Since 1992 the FDA policy considers the insertion of foreign genes into the plant genomes of crops as the equivalent of hybrid crops-crosses within the same species-and therefore exempt from the regulations on food additives.

Yet we know enough to have valid concerns. The plant genome is not like a Lego set; it is more like an ecosystem. You simply cannot predict the safety of gene inserts unless you do the testing.

Most GM food studies have been generated by industry and it is the industry itself with sole access to so much of the data. There is little funding of independent studies on the effects of GM foods, and those few scientists who have engaged in such studies and reported concerns are discounted. Their concerns cannot be resolved without serious and independent scientific study.

We are particularly concerned that at a time when conflicts of interest have become a major concern in science that the AAAS Board would not openly divulge that some in the AAAS leadership appear to have longstanding ties to the biotech industry. Since these ties have not been transparently disclosed, it is unclear whether there could also be ties to industrial concerns that might influence decision making of the AAAS leadership. Surely any reader of their position is entitled to such facts in considering their position. We advocate for full disclosure of all such ties by AAAS leaders.

The fact that no deaths have been attributed to GM crops does not mean they are safe. We do not see deaths associated with bisphenol A (BPA) and yet there are hundreds of studies pointing to risks. Risks that consumers have carefully considered when choosing whether or not to buy products containing BPA.

The Council for Responsible Genetics has supported GM food labeling for three decades. It is an integral part of our Genetic Bill of Rights. We further support an active move toward a comprehensive and independent risk assessment for GM foods; not the untenable default state that GMOS are safe. The public interest is not served when industry supported studies and government cooperation with industry are cited as proof of product safety.

Before we reach any conclusions with regard to GM foods, they must be studied. That's a basic scientific principle that the AAAS Board appears to have circumvented with their statement. In the meantime, consumers have the right to know which foods have GM ingredients before they choose what to feed themselves and their families.